Minutes[*]

Senate Consultative Committee
March 4, 1993

Present: Mario Bognanno (chair), Paul Carrier, David Dahlgren, Judith Garrard, Love Goel, Sonja
                Hoheisel, Paul Holm, Benjamin Liu, Tom Lopez, Karen Seashore Louis, Malaika McKee,
                Irwin Rubenstein, Anne Sales, Tess Sheir, Denise Tolbert, James Tracy, James VanAlstine,
                Shirley Zimmerman

Absent: John Adams, Amos Deinard, Lester Drewes, Toni McNaron, Dan Sinclair

[In these minutes: computing committee bylaw; gay/lesbian/bisexual civil rights legislation; ratio
between credits and contact hours; teaching evaluation protocol]

1. Computing Committee Bylaw

        Professor Bognanno convened the Senate Consultative Committee meeting at 12:50 and asked if
the Committee had any reservations about the proposed bylaw amendment extending the life of the
Senate Committee on Computing and Information Systems. There is, he commented, a clear need to
continue the committee; it is "up to its ears" in business and it is expected to be busy for some time to
come. There were no questions; without objection, it was agreed to place the amendment on the Senate
docket with SCC endorsement.

2. It's Time, Minnesota

        Professor Bognanno began the discussion by reporting on the discussion at the FCC meeting earlier
in the day and the resolution adopted by FCC (on a 6-3 vote, "the pending legislation is not an appropriate
subject for action by the Senate, and therefore the Senate Consultative Committee should not forward a
resolution to the Senate"). This, he reminded the Committee, was the FCC view; the final determination
is to be made by this Committee.

        One of the student members of the Committee expressed disappointment at the FCC action and
vowed to bring a resolution to the Senate even if under new business, because, it was said, this is an
important issue and the Senate needs to make a decision.

        Professor Bognanno reviewed the points made in the FCC discussion:

--   FCC inferred, apropos the letter from Regent Kuderer, that the University has made its
          position clear and has acted to the limits of its jurisdiction

--   There are different jurisdictions for different branches of government, and this subject is
          appropriately before the legislature--and is inappropriate for the University Senate to act

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on. All individuals can contact their legislators, hold fora, and conduct petition drives, but this is not appropriate for the governance system of the University.

--   The question of Senate discussion, without acting on a resolution, was not discussed at FCC.

--   FCC members do NOT oppose the substance of the resolution.

Committee members then argued various points of view about a possible Senate resolution:

--   It is time to "take the teachable moment" and endorse the legislation, even if at odds with public perception. The University should not take action for political expediency but for the principle.

--   The University Senate has only a small measure of authority, which is a precious commodity. It will be listened to, but only where it has a special competence to speak, about things specific to the University. The Senate has no special competence in matters like this, that are before the body politic, and it can do harm to the Senate to tell the rest of the world how to think.

--   If the Senate takes up moral issues, there are a LOT of issues in the world upon which it could make statements; many public policy matters have moral elements to them.

--   The Senate should NOT get involved in all legislation that various individuals may have strong feelings about, but there are occasional pieces of legislation which involve high moral values and there should be open discussion at the Senate. The question is not about SCC's screening role; it is about this specific piece of legislation.

--   The analogy with the Vietnam war is questionable; "wars come and go." This is a principle about the inclusion of all of humanity.

--   The Board of Regents, the only body that can speak with authority for the University, has made its position clear: There should not be discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation.

--   It is "impertinent" for SCC to decide that this should not receive Senate attention.

--   Should the Senate be lobbying, which it would be if it uses its license to endorse the legislation? No, the Senate is simply saying it supports the legislation. But that is using the Senate to lobby. What about a piece of legislation affecting AFSCME, for instance, which is closer to the University's interests; should the Senate take action on it? The question is the misuse of the Senate, not the merits of a bill.

--   Would it not be better to have an open forum, and let people vote? Or conduct a petition drive? Legislators will listen when confronted with thousands of signatures, while action by the University Senate is not going to be very effective.

--   There are issues where a University statement can be counterproductive, and this might be one of them. In much of the state the University is viewed as a very liberal place; it would be more effective to contact legislators on an individual basis rather than a collective one.

--   One concern is that if the Senate passes the resolution, people will feel they do not need to do other things, such as contact their legislators. But taking the narrow view, that the University is an enclosed space, and failing to recognizing the interconnections between the faculty, staff, and students. to the larger community misses a vital piece of its life. The outcome is not important; that the discussion and debate occurs is.

--   This issue is totally different from the ROTC issue.

--   "It's Time, Minnesota" has its own lobbyists working on behalf of the bill, and they are seeking University support. The University should have the courage to say yea or nay.

The Committee voted 10-4 to place the following resolution on the docket of the Senate without recommendation: "The University Senate supports the legislation authored by Representative Karen Clark and Senate Allen Spear adding `sexual or affectional orientation' to the list of protected classes in the State of Minnesota Human Rights Act." It was agreed that there would be no "comment" in the docket and that any information about the discussion at this meeting, and the FCC meeting, would be presented in floor debate.

It was agreed that the two items from the Senate Committee on Educational Policy (discussed next) should precede "It's Time, Minnesota," on the Senate docket, in case the debate on the latter should run longer than anticipated.

3. Ratio of Credits to Contact Hours

Professor Bognanno next turned to Professor Tracy to lead the discussion of the proposal from the Senate Committee on Educational Policy to change the existing Senate policy calling for a general 1:1 ratio between credits for a course and the number of contact hours per week. (See the FCC minutes of this same date for a brief recitation of the history behind the proposal.)   Several issues and points were raised in the discussion.

--   The proposal does sever the link between contact hours and credits for a course; it does NOT provide that in the case of a greater number of contact hours (e.g., five hours of lecture plus a lab), the credits for a course should be increased. Given that the proposal returns to the 1920s standard of three hours of work per week per credit awarded, Professor Tracy acknowledged, there could, at the extreme, be no more than 15 contact hours per week for a 5-credit course.

--   The policy should explicitly call for possible adjustment in credit hours following collection of data to evaluate the workload in courses; frequently, it was said, faculty members UNDERESTIMATE the amount of effort required by students. Professor Tracy agreed that the change was not unfriendly to SCEP's intent.

--   Rather than include a question on the student survey about the appropriateness of the

amount of work required, Professor Tracy observed that there is a link between this proposal and the teaching evaluation policy; as part of the peer review process, faculty can make reasonable estimates of the amount of work required of students as they evaluate the materials for a course. Ultimately, the determination of student effort required is a faculty matter, and faculty will evaluate each other's demands; while information from students can be helpful, this is not a matter for student decision. It was also agreed, however, that the policy would explicitly call for review of SYLLABI when credits for a course are being considered.

The Committee then voted without dissent to endorse the proposed change and to place it on the Senate docket.

4. Teaching Evaluation Policy

Professor Tracy again began the discussion with a brief review of the history of the proposal, and pointed out that what SCEP is bringing to the Committee is the implementing protocol required by the Senate policy adopted last Spring. A number of points were discussed.

--   In the case of "poison pen" comments from a vengeful student, most faculty members on the Committee seemed inclined not to take the likely impact on a faculty member very seriously. At Morris, it was pointed out, faculty members have the right to have the written comments screened for derogatory (i.e., racist, sexist, etc.) comments before they receive them. One view expressed was that the faculty are adults and should not get upset with "some yahoo calling them names."

--   SCEP was concerned about collection of data that might reveal the identity of the student, and concluded that demographic data should be requested, not required. The problem is with the NEXT course a student may need to take from the same instructor, if the student turns in a negative rating and is identified. If the students know the written comments go to the faculty, and fear they could be identified, they might write "lighter" comments. One possibility might be to include a statement that any student with concerns about an instructor may contact the department head in confidence; faculty members of the Committee assumed students knew this, but most of the students on the Committee were surprised to learn that was an option. It was later agreed that the University had an obligation to let students know of this option.

--   The possibility of having the written comments typed out by a clerical staff member was discussed, so that handwriting was eliminated as a factor; SCEP had declined to require that step because it would be a significant burden on departments--but they are not precluded from having the statements typed.

--   The question of who should receive copies of the written comments was discussed, especially in connection with the preceding point; the draft policy leaves it up to the departments to decide. The presumption in the policy is that the comments would be for use by the instructor in improvement of teaching. A number of the departments represented by faculty members on the Committee, however, also provide the comments to the department chair/head. Those who serve or have served as chair found that the

comments were an important addition to their fund of information for assessing faculty members as teachers. Professor Tracy agreed to bring back to SCEP the question of whether or not the policy should require that the written comments as well as the survey results be provided to whoever conducts the evaluation of the faculty member's teaching (i.e., department head/chair, elected salary committee, etc.).

--   Is it necessary to deal with the possibility that GPA correlates highly with positive course evaluations?

--   It is important to understand that this policy attempts to establish a norm, or expectations. There are legitimate questions about enforcement, and it will depend on the good will of the units. The control exists in that departments must answer to a dean, and implementation will depend on the University's structure accepting teaching evaluation, and the importance of teaching, as part of its responsibilities.

--   Permitting students to take the evaluations home might permit more thoughtful comments, but it also leads to a substantial drop in the return rate, thus possibly biasing the results. SCEP did agree, however, that the surveys should NOT be administered the last day of class, nor at the end of the class period--when time can be short.

--   There was some sentiment expressed, by both faculty and student members of the Committee, in support of requiring evaluation of EVERY course--which the Senate policy does not now require. Evaluation of every course would provide better data and it would make administration of the policy simpler, it was said. Moreover, if not all courses are to be evaluated, then students should be informed to whom they can make comments for those courses that are not evaluated. Doing so, it was said in response, would be over-regulating to prescribe what every faculty member must do in each course in terms of evaluation or directing students where to go to make comments. The faculty member, it was then said, should not be the one to select which courses will be evaluated, if the data are to be credible; there must be random selection or the data set will not be valid. The point may not need to be pursued now, but it should not be dropped.

Professor Tracy agreed to bring these concerns back to SCEP for its consideration.

The Committee adjourned at 2:50.

-- Gary Engstrand