

Minutes\*

**Senate Committee on Educational Policy**  
**Tuesday, April 18, 1995**  
**1:45 - 3:30**  
**Room 626 Campus Club**

Present: Kenneth Heller (chair), Elayne Donahue, Megan Gunnar, Darwin Hendel, Robert Johnson, Laura Coffin Koch, Darren Walhof

Regrets: Anita Cholewa, James Cotter, Manuel Kaplan, Judith Martin, William Van Essendelft, Gayle Graham Yates (on leave)

Absent: Ryan Nilsen

Guests: Provost W. Phillips Shively, Dr. Darwin Hendel and Dr. Jane Whiteside (Academic Affairs)

[In these minutes: Discussion with Provost Shively; critical measures]

**1. Discussion with Provost W. Phillips Shively**

Professor Heller convened the meeting at 1:45 and welcomed Provost Shively. He invited Professor Shively to make remarks.

Dr. Shively began by saying that he wished to work with SCEP and that he would be at the Committee's disposal. He said it is his intention to meet regularly with SCEP.

In terms of his position, he noted that he has (1) line and budget responsibilities for five colleges and (2) general oversight responsibilities for undergraduate education across the University. He said he intends to begin immediately a search for a vice provost for curriculum and instruction to replace Richard Skaggs, who has served as chair of the Council on Liberal Education; he said he would welcome the advice of the Committee on this position.

His general vision is that this is a metropolitan university as well as the only research university in the state; the University should pay attention to those things that are unique to that status. The largest issue requiring attention is the quality of the faculty and departments; it will be a high priority for him to maintain and build that quality.

While it is a cliché to point out that the University exists in a rapidly changing environment, it is nonetheless true that it must be flexible, creative, and efficient in dealing with those with whom it works--citizens, students, farmers, and so on.

---

\*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 reflect the views of, nor are they binding on, the Senate or Assembly, the Administration, or the Board of Regents.

Dr. Shively said he had four primary goals as he assumed office:

- maintain and strengthen the quality of faculty and departments
- build diversity at all levels
- provide better support to the faculty in their work
- assist everyone in being flexible, creative, and efficient.

In undergraduate education, one of his personal priorities is to leave office with writing instruction at the University better than it was when he took the position. He said he would welcome learning what SCEP's priorities are.

Asked how he would improve undergraduate education, Dr. Shively said that one area he would like to see improved is the services with which undergraduates must deal as students (e.g., financial aid, parking, etc.). These are not totally within his control, he acknowledged, but said he hoped he could help improve them.

In addition, he told the Committee he was interested in things that are particularly the University's tasks. It is the major provider of undergraduate education in the metropolitan area, for example, which creates special obligations with respect to diversity. It will be important to bring in students without a family background in college attendance. There are, moreover, experiences that only a research university can provide, such as research experiences and substantive courses in a foreign language. There is also need for continued work on improvement of large introductory courses; those are not unique to the University, but they are a big part of undergraduate education, and the quality of those classes should be high.

Diversity was a big issue in the search that led to his appointment, noted one Committee member; what are his views on that subject? There are a lot of things to do to improve diversity, Dr. Shively said. He said he tends to focus more on "pipeline" issues, but also believes in competing for women and minorities for student, faculty, and administrative posts. The problem with competition, he observed, is that if the University recruits someone, it increases diversity at Minnesota but reduces it elsewhere; it is more important to increase the numbers of minorities and women in graduate school in order to increase the number of people qualified for faculty and administrative positions. There are a number of things that can be done to increase the numbers in the pipeline. For example, the University was involved several years ago in a program with the St. Paul schools to prepare students of color for college; he said he did not know the present status of that effort.

Retention is a problem at all levels, Dr. Shively said. It is not necessarily bad if a faculty member or administrator leaves the University for better positions, but it IS bad if they are pushed out or if they are uncomfortable here. There are simply a lot of low-level, micro issues that adversely affect working conditions for women and people of color that must be addressed.

His view is that diversity is not primarily an issue of justice, although it is that as well; it is a question of what the University gets from achieving diversity. The University is in a good position, in the metropolitan area, to draw on a multicultural society, and must take advantage of that opportunity. Diversity is the future of the United States, he observed, and he wants the University to be a part of that future. He agreed that accomplishing true diversity will require a change in the climate.

Asked if he had any ideas about obtaining increased resources to direct to the goals he outlined, Dr. Shively said he did not have easy ones, at the moment. The time is one of shrinking resources, and the University must be as creative as possible. He agrees with the view expressed by central administrators that the pie must be expanded. One way to do so might be by identifying services the University can provide that people need (for example, professional Masters degrees; among universities in metropolitan areas, Minnesota offers remarkably few such programs).

One Committee member, recalling an external department review, reported that the reviewers were horrified at the number of hours faculty spend in committee meetings. Combined with the loss of secretaries and other support, there has been a marked decline in the quality of faculty life. Is there anything he proposes to do about that? For an administrator to suggest that faculty governance committees not meet puts him in an odd position, Dr. Shively noted wryly, but recalled that one of the accomplishments he prided himself on most was engineering a restructuring of Senate committees so their number was reduced by half.

What creates the problems, it was said, is not the standing committees; it is the ad hoc committees and special task forces, which are usually created to ensure that all have a voice. Dr. Shively agreed, but pointed out that there will be significant changes in the next few years, especially on the Twin Cities campus, and there will be issues upon which students and faculty will want to be heard.

This subject touches three issues, one Committee member observed: women, diversity, and the demands on faculty time. There is a need to protect women faculty and faculty of color from committee work. Another Committee member said that a trivial way of demonstrating diversity is to have women, and especially women of color, on committees.

One solution, Dr. Shively said, is to be hard-nosed about making committees smaller. There are tasks that will need participation of faculty and students, but a committee of 18 is not needed to obtain those contributions. He said he would argue that most special committees should have seven or fewer people, but should also be charged to seek participation by others in some way. Much could be done by email, noted one Committee member, thus reducing the number of meetings that are needed.

What will happen if the change is made to semesters, asked one Committee member? It will take a LOT of work, it was said, and one hears from the administration about the administrative adjustments that will be required. The need to redo courses and departmental curricula will be an enormous amount of work, as will the need to completely redo the liberal education curriculum. Will this change be accomplished "without killing off faculty"? Will they be expected to implement the necessary changes while also doing their regular teaching and research jobs? Has anyone outlined a PROCEDURE by which faculty effort could be freed up? The only way to make the change in ways that are not counterproductive is either to permit faculty to not teach some fraction of their courses (which would be counterproductive for STUDENTS) or to pay faculty so they could work over the summer (but that is time usually spent on research). Another alternative, it was pointed out, was to use temporary faculty to give regular faculty release time to revise the curriculum.

Dr. Shively said he thought the University would change to semesters. One big problem will be that the change will occur simultaneously across the entire University; it would be easier to accommodate

were it to be in smaller pieces. He said he would have to consider the problems and that he would do what he could, but warned that there is no magic solution. The change will come, unfortunately, at a time when the University is being assaulted in other ways. The idea of hiring temporary faculty to give regular faculty release time is a good one, but it will probably be of limited use. Where would the funds come from, asked one Committee member? The University will not be able to rely on the legislature, Dr. Shively said, but he promised he would do what he could to help.

Dr. Shively was asked if he believed the size of the faculty would shrink. He responded that he did, and noted that it has been shrinking gradually in recent years, but by attrition. He would like to see the size decrease further, within limits, in order to provide better support to those who remain. Rather than see the reductions driven by external events, he said he would like to go farther than what is driven by the cash flow in order to provide that additional support for remaining faculty. It is not smart for the University to have as many faculty as it can afford but not provide them with basic tools to do their work. Recently, observed one Committee member, the contraction has been non-productive; the faculty is getting smaller and the situation worse, which means the University is losing its competitive advantage.

Asked about eliminating departments, Dr. Shively said he had no such plans now but that over the next few years decisions will have to be made. But there are win-win things that can be considered, he told the Committee, such as collaboration with other institutions. There may be opportunities for individual colleges to work with other higher education institutions in the Twin Cities; he has himself been working on cooperative programs at the Ph.D. level with the University of Wisconsin. The strengths of each institution can be brought to a program to make it better.

One Committee member commented that in the new U.S. News and World Report rankings of graduate programs, the University as a whole is not doing that well; its programs are in the top 25, for the most part, but they are ranked in the 20s. Other universities are moving up while Minnesota is in danger, in many cases, of slipping out of the top rated research institutions. There is a danger that the University is floating down to the bottom, which is the result of "death by a thousand cuts."

Dr. Shively agreed that the situation is precarious, although the University still has a number of departments that are national leaders. Most departments are understaffed by comparison with their peers, with respect to the number of students they enroll. Those rankings must be taken seriously, he said, in terms of what they imply for the University. They are not the only quality ranking, by any means, but they are important--and they are one reason his first priority is improving the quality of faculty and departments.

One Committee member inquired what role Dr. Shively would play in support for graduate students, and what role that support had in the issue of quality. His role is not clear, Dr. Shively replied, although it will be significant in TA support (his role will be less in fellowships). Well-supported TAs are very important to quality, he said. One function graduate programs perform for the community is to act as a magnet to bring a lot of smart graduate students; about half who come stay in the area after their University studies and do a lot for the state. A number of students from his own field have left academia and become private sector executives, government officials, city managers, and so on in the state. The graduate programs are a tremendous recruiting device for the state, and demonstrate again how a research university is an economic engine. It also suggests the symbiosis between high quality faculty and high quality graduate students, both of whom, in turn, create a good environment for undergraduates.

A related problem is that TAs now cost departments a great deal, and many departments can no longer afford as many TAs with full benefits. Partial TA positions without health benefits do not allow many grad students to work for the University because they cannot afford to. This deprives the graduate students of a valuable experience. This is also a diversity issue, added another Committee member, because a mother with children need health benefits the most. From the perspective of a department that has money for TA support, said another Committee member, success in recruiting quality graduate students depends on program quality; what will the Ph.D. be worth at the end? To compete with other schools for top students, TA funding is important, it was said; so is department quality. Dr. Shively observed that in his experience, the higher the quality of the department, the more competitive the situation becomes in recruiting graduate students, some of whom receive several offers.

In that effort, another Committee member pointed out, timing is everything, and departments need certainty. The way some fellowships are awarded is not helpful, in that nominees must be referred to a University committee, which takes too much time. High quality departments need a certain number of awards they can give on the spot. The Graduate School did begin to provide block grants, Dr. Shively observed, and this has helped, but providing more grants to departments may be warranted.

Asked about his relationship with the Graduate School, Dr. Shively observed that there has always been a dotted-line relationship between the colleges and the Graduate School. Its relationship with the provosts has not yet been clarified in the reorganization.

In response to a query, Dr. Shively said he plans to hire a half-time replacement for Professor Skaggs, and has tentatively planned also to hire a half-time vice provost for "academic affairs." He will, thus, have the equivalent of one full-time faculty appointment, and decided to create two positions with it. The gain in positions will be that half-time post, which is not unreasonable considering the functions that have been added to the position (devolved from Academic Affairs) when it was made into a provostship. Central administration expenditures are being reduced substantially; some funds are being cut and some are being provided to the provosts.

The Committee and Dr. Shively then discussed various initiatives that have been started, some of which have also been finished. It was said that the University often begins things, sees they are beneficial, but then does not continue them; Dr. Shively said a number of beneficial changes have been made that are continuing (e.g., elements of the Undergraduate Initiative). Whether or not new such initiatives should be undertaken, he said, is something to be considered.

Professor Heller thanked Dr. Shively for joining the meeting.

## **2. Critical Measures**

Professor Heller welcomed Drs. Hendel and Whiteside to discuss the most recent proposals for the next set of critical measures. Dr. Hendel began by outlining the timetable for continued discussion leading to Regental action on the measures and the changes that have been made in terms of which measures would be dealt with when.

One Committee member reflected that there are now 19 "critical measures" (18 plus technology,

which, it has been determined, is appropriately be a separate measure); is that too many to call "critical"? Critical means crucial to the health of the institution; are these ALL that critical? Is there need for a change in terminology?

Dr. Hendel accepted the point, and explained that the language of the Regents' resolution included the terms critical measures and benchmarks, so that is what they have been using. He agreed that perhaps not ALL of them will be critical for institutional health, but pointed out that a small number of measures could not do justice to the wide range of University missions activities. The question is one of label. He noted also that the University's work on critical measures is having an effect in the legislature, which is beginning to ask institutions to focus on performance measures, not merely the number of students enrolled.

Dr. Whiteside added that they are fully aware that these measures do not emerge from a theoretical framework; they arose from many conversations with many people about what is important. That lack of framework makes them harder to justify and makes it more difficult to sort out the relationships between the measures. It may be that some measures are really pieces of something bigger. There is nothing wrong with an empirical approach, observed one Committee member, but perhaps it is now time to see if there IS a theoretical framework that would illuminate the measures, provide them structure. There is a lot of stuff in these measures; one can wonder how they play with various audiences. They may appear to very diffuse. Dr. Hendel agreed that at some point the measures may need to be simplified, perhaps after the third group has been established.

The first five measures now almost appear a little silly, said one Committee member, and not directly on the main goals of the University. It is not clear what direction the University should go in investment per student, for example; it may be that there is a need for greater efficiency, which would reduce the amount. Or educational services may be needed, which would increase that amount. The question is really one of students' learning. Another measure, the graduation rate, is affected by the determination of the kind of institution the University wants to be. It may be appropriate for the only research university in the state to "cast a wide net" and thus have a graduation rate of only 50%. It may be necessary to reconsider some of the first measures before they take on a life of their own, or subsume them under other measures. Dr. Hendel repeated his affirmation made in an earlier meeting; institutional performance will be looked at over a long period of time, and if a measure turns out not to make sense, the University will not continue using it.

One point made in an earlier discussion was that the measures should also prominently address student learning and academic achievement, Dr. Hendel recalled. That is difficult to do across colleges and campuses, he said, and is a measure that has no institutional-level meaning--but it certainly does so for colleges and campuses.

There can be some institution-wide measures of learning, said one Committee member. If a graduate cannot write thoughts coherently, in clear English, the University is in trouble. There are basic goals that can be measured. Math is another example; there are levels of mathematical understanding that ALL students should have. It comes down to "reading, writing, and arithmetic." The problem is that NO department is responsible for these basic skills (and not the Math and English departments). Graduates are expected to be leaders in some way in their lives; what is it that society expects them to have in the way of skills? It should be possible to define and measure them.

One Committee member said this sounds like the liberal education requirements, observed Dr. Whiteside; those, it was responded, are simply seat time requirements, not performance. The presumption is that students have had to perform at some level in order to pass the courses, Dr. Hendel said. But those requirements are not fundamentally different from the group distribution requirements that existed before, it was argued; there is no significant math requirement, there is no writing across the curriculum as yet.

And these skills are much more important than graduation rates, argued another Committee member; competence in these areas affects people the rest of their lives. The diploma may be a joke if students don't have these overarching skills. The University could readily increase its graduation rate, observed another Committee member; it could just grant everyone a diploma, although that is certainly not what the University is about. There are performance criteria in the languages that exist now; they could also be established in writing and other areas.

There is a tension in measuring student satisfaction; to make education better, its acquisition must be more painful for some students, and some will fail. If the University wants to provide something that will benefit students for the rest of their careers, it must make demands and some will have to struggle. It is possible students at the time will not be satisfied, but will be later; this is hard to assess.

This will be a challenge, Dr. Hendel agreed, to do something at the institutional level, but there must have a clear picture of institutional goals. There are diverse views of what they should be; without a clear vision, measurement puts the cart before the horse. That is not true, maintained one Committee member; faculty could identify a short list of things every student should be able to do. There may be debate on the edges, but the overlap in what faculty would identify would be solid.

While the University has standards, it is frightening to see how much current students, especially those who come from a first generation in college, and from poverty, come not knowing; even with tremendous progress in college, they are not where they should be in five years. That is why, said another Committee member, there must be support, especially for "at risk" students; it is no favor to students to graduate them without necessary skills.

There is a "steady drip" problem with standards, observed one Committee member. Faculty come initially with high standards, and over time they settle down to whatever causes the least stress but that does not embarrass them. The faculty needs to specify its standards and must insist that students perform at that level. As long as students are provided educational support, the faculty should be protected from complaints that students are failing. This is the problem of being liked versus adhering to standards, said another. And "being liked" is often the path of least resistance.

Dr. Hendel said that agreement could probably be reached on desired educational outcomes; it is not clear that they can be measured across all parts of the University (as the languages can be). How critical thinking is to be defined and measured, for example, varies with the discussion. Are there non-disciplinary elements of an education that can be measured? Probably, but they would be so generic it would be difficult to relate them to the curriculum. One Committee member argued that process cannot be separated from content; students should be able to pass a critical thinking test in a range of subject areas.

If one thinks about the GRE, pointed out one Committee member, the best predictor of a GRE score is the SAT score; how will a test be designed that measures what is learned HERE? It would NOT be the GRE or SAT, another Committee member agreed, but every faculty member knows what it is. This kind of measuring would not be machine graded; it would be more subjective and labor-intensive testing, and all students who are to graduate should be tested.

There is more to be gained from focused efforts at the department and college level than from an institutional-level assessment of student achievement, Dr. Hendel maintained. If this were a small liberal arts college, universal testing of graduation candidates might be appropriate. The University is department- and discipline-driven; it makes more sense to embed assessment in the departments. And it should not be mandated, he said in response to a query. But that will take more effort and result in no savings, objected one Committee member, because there will still be the same number of students to test.

His perspective is that faculty are concerned with what students learn, and their focus is on the course. They have not, Dr. Hendel said, looked at a field and asked if graduates in X are the kind of people the University wants to graduate. There is no mechanism to put the big picture together.

On the question of skills, Dr. Whiteside asked, are there two levels? One, the liberal education/general skills society expects all graduates to have, and two, knowledge or skills associated with a discipline or major. It may be that the student experience needs to be a blend of the two. One way to think about this, said one Committee member, is to ask how each unit would support the general skills and inquire what resources would be needed. At present, no one is responsible for them; if a student cannot write to express an idea, faculty abandon writing and use multiple-choice tests.

This is the debate about the responsibility to teach content versus process, said one Committee member. If this is an institutional goal, said another, the institution must cover it; resources are needed for courses to which students can be sent to learn--or resources can be made available for departments to integrate the skills into courses.

One Committee member cautioned that the University should not put too much stake in the general satisfaction question that would be addressed to students; it does not measure much, it was said. More specific questions could be useful. Dr. Hendel said both are needed; the general question highlights the overall focus on satisfaction; responses to specific questions can show where improvements are needed.

These measures are different from the first five, Dr. Hendel pointed out; there is less baseline data available, and they have not proposed performance goals. What should be the institutional goal for student satisfaction? Is where it is now desirable? Ought it increase? We do not know what the answer should be, said one Committee member; if most were dissatisfied, that would be unacceptable, but there could be negative reactions because students wished they had learned more. What is the University's response if 20% of the students say they are dissatisfied, asked Dr. Hendel? If no one knows why, it is hard to interpret the data, said one Committee member. And the response to the general satisfaction question can reflect the mood of the day, satisfaction with life in general--it could be related to more than student life.

No one claims student life is now wonderful; there are lots of little annoyances every day, none of consequence, but which add up to make the pursuit of learning unpleasant. These should be cleaned up.

One measure of student satisfaction is contact with good faculty members outside the classroom, said one Committee member. They also need contact with other students outside of class on academic matters.

It was agreed that Drs. Hendel and Whiteside would return at the May 2 meeting to continue the discussion of these measures.

-- Gary Engstrand

University of Minnesota