

EQUITY, ACCESS & DIVERSITY  
MINUTES OF MEETING  
NOVEMBER 20, 2006

[In these minutes: Discussion with Vice Provost Swan regarding equity, access & diversity issues as they relate to the proposed campus-wide honors program]

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

PRESENT: Naomi Scheman, chair, Patricia Jones-Whyte, Susan Cable, Don Cavalier, Kris Lockhart for Rusty Barcelo, Claire Walter-Marchetti, Richard Graff, Jooinn Lee, Louis Mendoza, Margaret Moss, Joanna O'Connell, Lee Penn, Jonathan Bringewatt

REGRETS: Carolyn Chalmers, Jennifer Gunn, Walt Jacobs

ABSENT: Hawona Sullivan Janzen, Anne Phibbs

GUEST: Vice Provost for Undergraduate Education Craig Swan

I). Professor Scheman called the meeting to order. Members introduced themselves.

II). Professor Scheman thanked Vice Provost Swan for attending today's meeting. She noted that the committee is taking seriously its charge to pay attention to issues of equity, access and diversity at the University. Last year the committee closely followed the work of the various Strategic Positioning Task Forces and their recommendations.

Of particular interest to the committee was the recommendation put forward by the Academic Task Force – Undergraduate Reform: Honors to create a new campus-wide undergraduate honors program, and how this could impact equity, access and diversity on campus.

Vice Provost Swan noted that the recommendation is to create a campus-wide undergraduate honors program on the Twin Cities campus. Currently, honors programs are college-specific. Under the proposed honors program model, students would be admitted into a college and into the honors program. There are three driving reason for the creation of a single honors program:

1. Eliminate the balkanization of the current honors experience for students.
2. Hold all honors students equally accountable for rigorous participation in the intellectual life of the University.
3. Construct an honors opportunity that would attract students who may otherwise not be considering the University e.g. the proposed Grand Challenges curriculum.

Finalists are being interviewed for the position of founding director of the Twin Cities honors program noted Vice Provost Swan. This position will be responsible for spearheading the new campus-wide honors program. An important issue for both the honors program implementation committee and for this committee is the need to have the honors program be broadly representative of the University's diverse student body.

He added the University's location advantages it in many ways with its access to cultural and political resources as well as public engagement opportunities, which students will likely find attractive. The proposed honors program is expected to offer students special research opportunities and will strongly encourage students to study abroad whenever possible. The philosophy will be that for those students who are given special opportunities, much will be expected. What exactly is meant by this concept still needs to be fleshed out. With the likelihood that many honors students will be leaders on campus as well as leaders in their civic, professional and personal lives after graduation, the University needs to work closely with these students when they first arrive in terms of expectations and opportunities.

What is meant by 'Grand Challenges curriculum' asked a member? Vice Provost Swan stated that this phrase resonates in different ways with different people. With this said, he noted that the Grand Challenges curriculum centers around creating a linked set of courses that would form the core of the initial honors experience, which would be organized around grand challenges facing society or various disciplines. Some of these courses would also serve to satisfy certain liberal arts requirements.

Currently, the IT honors program is failing in terms of having a diverse student body stated a member. There are a lack of female students and students of color in this program. How will simply verbalizing that there should be a diverse campus-wide honors program going to create a change? Vice Provost Swan stated that to make this goal a reality will require sitting down and talking to students and instructors, and developing specific recruitment strategies. Also, if there are issues such as the curriculum that are affecting diversity this would also need to be taken into consideration.

Will the honors program be a two-year program? No, stated Vice Provost Swan, in his mind it would be a four-year program to graduation. Assuming students are meeting honors expectations, the presumption should be that they would continue in the program without having to reapply after their sophomore year. While for obvious reasons honors students need to be strongly linked to the departments in which they are majoring, they should also be linked to other honors students noted Vice Provost Swan. This can add an important dimension to a student's University experience. Another expectation that should be afforded honors students is access to the broader intellectual life of the campus. A member mentioned that IAS (Institute for Advanced Study) could play an important role in this area.

Assuming a campus-wide honors program is created, would individual college honors programs be dissolved? Yes, stated Vice Provost Swan. For example, he stated that the

IT honors office and apparatus would be disbanded, but the IT honors curriculum would continue.

Will a campus-wide honors program mean fewer honors students for the campus? Vice Provost Swan stated that size discussions are underway for the proposed campus-wide honors program. Currently, the University admits approximately 650 honor students each year, but only graduates 350 – 400. There is a sense that the new program would admit 500 – 600 students, but the expectation would be that graduation rates would closely match admittance numbers. Vice Provost Swan also believes that an honors program should be open to transfer students as well as students who did not apply for the honors program when they initially applied to attend the University.

In terms of admissions into a campus-wide honors program, no one believes that admission based strictly on test scores is a good idea, stated Vice Provost Swan. Because honors curriculum and opportunities will be demanding and intellectually engaging it is critical that students who are looking for this type of challenge are accepted into the program.

Professor Scheman stated that the committee believes that diversity issues need to be central to the University's mission if it expects to become one of the top three public research universities in the world. The University needs to think about all the decisions that it makes in these terms. Along these lines, consideration needs to be given to what undergraduate students can contribute to help the University work toward its goal of becoming a top research university. Instead of thinking just about which students are in the best position to get well educated at the University, thought should be given to what undergraduate honor students can do for the University. Building bridges between the University and different communities that think differently from those that are already well-socialized into academia will give instructors the experience of teaching students that are not younger versions of themselves. It will also be important to engage students so they are contributing fully of themselves while at the University, and thereby having a sense of ownership for their education and the University.

Professor Scheman supported the notion of a campus-wide honors program where honor students are linked not only to other honors students in their college but honors students across the campus. In Professor Scheman's opinion, however, students should be linked around a sense of mission/purpose rather than simply because they are smart, and she argued for having transformation around diversity as being such a mission. By taking this approach, the University's new honors program could truly be distinctive, and potentially achieve national attention.

Vice Provost Swan stated that for the most part he agreed with Professor Scheman's comments with the exception of the comment that an honors program should mean one thing for all students. Beyond the generic definition of diversity, the University has a diversity of students and interests, which it must be responsive to. There will likely be broad program expectations, which students can accomplish in different ways. Students'

passions need to be identified and supported, and this will manifest itself in different ways for different students.

Thought needs to be given to how the University can nurture a cohort of students, many of who are the first in their family to finish high school and go to college, who will not look like the typical honors student, stated a member. These non-traditional students are able to make unique contributions and have perspectives on issues that traditional students do not have. Many of these students' non-academic experiences have proven to be enormously valuable. Without the presence of General College, the University needs to think about how the colleges will assume these functions. How will the new honors program work with the colleges in order to recruit, groom, prepare and nurture non-traditional students, students of color and first-generation students who would not otherwise be pipelined into the University by privilege?

Without diminishing the importance of these comments, Vice Provost Swan stated that these issues are much bigger than the new honors program. In reality, the honors program will not be able to solve broad-based issues of success in high school, preparation for college, etc. These broader issues are bigger than the University and will require collaboration with many groups both inside and outside the University.

It was suggested that the University have conversations with non-traditional students and their instructors when designing the new honors program. Vice Provost Swan agreed that this type of dialogue should occur, but he doesn't think the implementation committee is at this point yet. A member voiced her concern that too often these dialogues either never occur, or, if they do, the implementation process is already too far along for input to be incorporated into the design of a program. Before these conversations can occur, stated Vice Provost Swan, a founding director for the honors program needs to be named.

Another recommendation from the Academic Task Force – Undergraduate Reform: Honors is for fast-track programs for professional opportunities, e.g. nursing. Of great concern to deans whose programs would be affected has to do with the diversity of the professions and the students that are enrolled. In Vice Provost Swan's opinion, fast-track admissions could help to address these diversity concerns.

On a separate note, unrelated to an honors program, Vice Provost Swan stated that consideration is being given to whether the campus should identify and focus on a particular issue for a period of one or two years and organize a series of events that would facilitate a broad campus-wide discussion around an issue. Professor Scheman added that last year the committee discussed this same idea as a means of bringing the University community together to work on a specific project, e.g. greening of the campus. It was further mentioned by a member that Vice President Barcelo has been exploring having sustained dialogues on identity and multiple identities, and it would be great if these dialogues were campus-wide.

In response to comments from members, Vice Provost Swan agreed that the University needs a robust community of diverse faculty and staff to support the institution's diverse student body.

A member noted that an honors program implies qualitative excellence. But, if approached from a perspective of diversity, an honors program should be inclusive rather than exclusive. Vice Provost Swan agreed and stated that this is the reason that there is such strong opposition to admitting students strictly based on test scores and GPA. The program needs to represent not only diversity but also excellence in the broader sense, which may not be able to be quantified.

Professor Scheman stated that while she agrees that the University should be doing whatever it can to help students graduate on time, if the University is serious about its commitment to diversity it needs to acknowledge the lives of non-traditional students. Currently, non-traditional students that would like to add an undergraduate degree to an already fascinating resume are not being well served by the University. Vice Provost Swan stated he believes that graduation rates are an appropriate measure of student success, which the University should be held accountable for. He added that the University's 13-credit policy allows for flexibility when appropriate.

In terms of honors admission, Professor Scheman suggested that the University consider posing a question on its application to students asking them to share their experiences and interests and to explain how these experiences and interests would benefit the University as it strives to transform itself and connect with diverse communities. Vice Provost Swan encouraged members to forward any additional ideas or concerns to him at [swan@umn.edu](mailto:swan@umn.edu) and he will make sure they get to the appropriate person/group for consideration.

Professor Scheman thanked Vice Provost Swan for attending today's meeting.

III). Hearing no further business, Professor Scheman adjourned the meeting.

Renee Dempsey  
University Senate