

Senate Committee on Educational Policy (SCEP)
December 9, 2020
Minutes of the Meeting

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 represent the views of, nor are they binding on, the senate, the administration or the Board of Regents.

[**In these minutes:** Fall 2021 Start Date; Standardized Testing/Test Optional Discussion; P&A on SCEP/SCEP Membership; Update on Microcredentials]

PRESENT: Thomas Chase (chair), Toni Abts, June Carbone, Dan Delaney, Stacy Doepner-Hove, Jennifer Goodnough, Nathan Gray-Garcia, Brett Heischmidt, Stephanie Huisman, Sara Hurley, Scott Lanyon, John LaVelle, Danya Leebaw, Robert McMaster, Katherine Scheil, Brian Sick, Rayan Tejada, Drew Vechell

REGRETS: Robert Poch, Jennie Row

ABSENT: Jacob Smiley

GUESTS: Rachel Croson, Executive Vice President and Provost; Gunnar Frahm, vice chair, Student Senate/Student Senate Consultative Committee; Kathryn Pearson, chair, Council on Liberal Education; Marlo Welshons, assistant to the provost, Office of the Executive Vice President and Provost; Briggs Tople, chair, Student Senate/Student Senate Consultative Committee

OTHERS: Deb Cran, senior assistant to the provost, Office of the Executive Vice President and Provost; Ety DeVeaux, chief of staff, Graduate Education; Brianne Keeney, assistant to the president, Office of the President; Jennifer Reckner, director, Office of Undergraduate Education; Leslie Schiff, associate dean, University curriculum, Office of Undergraduate Education; Erin Slattengren, assistant to the provost, Office of the executive Vice President and Provost; Sue Van Voorhis, associate vice provost and University registrar, Office of Undergraduate Education

1. Fall 2021 Start Date

Professor Thomas Chase, chair, called the meeting to order. He explained that several University community members had raised the issue that the start of fall 2021 on the Twin Cities/Rochester campuses overlaps with Rosh Hashanah. He pointed out that there are often conflicts between religious holidays and scheduled classes; the issue here is that it is the first two days of the semester. Vice President and Provost Rachel Croson was present seeking SCEP's advice on whether to change the start date, and if so, how to make up the instructional days. The administration had provided the following options for the latter:

- Start early (before Labor Day)
- Eliminate holidays
- Change the exam schedule
- Continue the semester after the holidays

Chase shared a [document](#) outlining the issue and potential solutions in more detail. Croson encouraged the committee not to make a decision at this meeting, but to consult with other groups, such as University Relations, the Minnesota Student Association (MSA), etc.

Chase then shared relevant excerpts from Administrative Policy: [Academic Calendars](#):

- “Academic calendars must be established at least four years in advance so that students may plan their schedules and University units may plan events. Changes in dates to previously approved calendars must be made at least two years before the start of the academic year of that calendar.”
- “The academic calendar has a fall and a spring semester, each of which includes a minimum of 70 days of instruction, a maximum of 75 days of instruction, and approximately one week of final examinations (including Saturdays but not Sundays).”

Chase noted in particular that policy dictates that there are supposed to be six exam days and a study day. Fall 2021 is already an exception, as it was necessary to put the study day on a Sunday in order to fit in 70 instructional days, because Labor Day is late in 2021.

Bob McMaster noted that he had significant concerns about changing the calendar at this point in time. Starting early would be disruptive for Welcome Week, he said, and eliminating the day after Thanksgiving as a holiday is undesirable, as frequently students advocate for more of a fall break.

Members pointed out the following additional considerations:

- Many religious holidays overlap with instructional days; these are specifically listed as legitimate absences under Administrative Policy: [Makeup Work for Legitimate Absences](#). Additionally, Rosh Hashanah is specifically called out as an exception in Administrative Policy: [Mandatory Attendance at First Class Session and Consequences for Absence](#)
- For courses that meet once a week, losing a day is a big deal.
- Holding exams on Sunday introduces an issue with transportation
- Starting early also potentially has an impact on international students, with regard to visa applications, travel plans, etc.
- Starting the semester early could impact international students (with regard to visa applications, travel plans, etc.); students, faculty and staff who are parents; internships and field placements; and housing contracts.

At this point, Chase initiated a straw poll, asking members whether they felt the date should be changed for fall 2021. Ten members voted no, and six voted yes. Therefore, the discussion turned to how to minimize the negative impact on Jewish students, and how to prevent this from happening in the future.

Jennifer Goodnough commented that during her three years as chair of SCEP, she had been approached several times about changing the calendar, mostly with regard to adding a fall break for the Twin Cities and Rochester campuses. SCEP discussed the issue many times, but never changed the calendar. Goodnough noted that explaining the complexities and constraints with regard to the calendar had helped petitioners understand SCEP’s position.

Danya Leebaw added that recognizing the importance of Rosh Hashanah in the Jewish faith, and the fact that the semester is structured around Christian holidays, would be an important part of the conversation.

Sara Hurley commented that she had seen some faculty who observe Rosh Hashanah solve this problem by using pre-recorded lectures for those days.

Members brought up the following considerations for future conversations:

- The limitation imposed by the State Fair is a big issue; it would be good to find out if there is any flexibility with that.
- Is there a way to change the calendar in the future to be more equitable around religious holidays?
- SCEP could have a conversation about this issue with Michael Goh, vice president, Equity and Diversity; as well as the Equity, Access, and Diversity Committee (EAD)
- It may be useful to include those advocating for the change in the conversation, so that they could weigh in on how to implement the change.

Crosen thanked the committee for their advice, noting that she would contact those who had raised the issue, describe the situation, challenges and constraints, and inform them that SCEP and EAD would look into the issue for future calendars. She added that it would be important to keep this conversation in mind when setting the calendar for 2032, which is the next time Rosh Hashanah will coincide with the day after Labor Day. That calendar will be set by 2027. The committee requested that Crosen update the committee on the communication plan around this issue, in order to ensure that the accommodations offered under policy are followed; Crosen agreed.

2. Standardized Testing/Test Optional Discussion

Next, Chase turned the floor over to Bob McMaster for a discussion of the test optional movement. McMaster noted the following:

- The conversation about standardized tests in admissions (specifically the ACT for the University of Minnesota) has been ongoing for a long time; one camp feels they are important, the other camp feels that they are not that useful.
- Because of the pandemic, standardized tests were canceled, so many colleges and universities (including the University of Minnesota) waived the requirement for the fall 2021 class. The decision as to whether to extend the waiver to fall 2022 has not yet been made.
- Some advocate for the University to transition to test-optional as a permanent strategy. Each of the five system campuses makes its own decision on this; Crookston has decided they will be test optional for at least the next five years.
- The University utilizes a holistic review approach when making admissions decisions. This includes primary factors (test scores, GPA, rank, etc.), and secondary factors (leadership, service, study abroad, athletics, etc.).
- The Board of Regents has mandated that the Twin Cities campus must maintain an average ACT score of 28 for incoming classes.
 - There is a wide variation around the average of 28; and there is a lot of variation by college.

- The average ACT score has been dropping over the last several years.

McMaster explained that his office has done analysis of the pros and cons of the test-optional scenario.

Points in support of requiring ACT scores:

- Nationally normed tests do help predict students' success in the first year. However, GPA is the primary variable.
- Due to grade inflation, GPA is becoming problematic.
- High school rank is only reported by about 50% of high schools.
- ACT scores help determine admissions into the Honors program.
- Scores from each section of the ACT (subscores) are helpful in placing students into colleges.
- ACT scores enable admissions officers to compare students across states and even countries.

Points against requiring ACT scores:

- The tests alone do not predict success.
- Wealthier students are more likely to have access to test prep programs, often go to better schools, etc., therefore, requiring standardized tests may hinder diversity goals.
 - The University of California system did a study on the use of standardized tests and determined that it does not dampen diversity.
 - The University of Minnesota Twin Cities' incoming freshman class has been increasingly diverse every year. There is no direct evidence that standardized tests are hindering that goal.

Members made the following comments:

- If the courts decide that some factors (such as race and ethnicity) cannot be considered, eliminating ACT scores as a factor in admissions leaves the GPA and the essay, which is not much to go on. McMaster said that so far, the courts have determined that race and ethnicity can be used as a secondary factor.
- If the Twin Cities campus went to test-optional admissions, there would be a ripple-down effect on the other system campuses, because often students secondarily apply to a system campus.
- There is a perception that test optional admissions are more inclusive; if this is not accurate, there should be messaging that communicates this.
- Academic advisors often use ACT subscores to help students register. Not having that information could have an impact on college success if students are advised to take courses that they are not prepared for.
- The move to test optional should be seriously considered. A faculty committee with diverse representation across disciplines would be valuable.
- The tests themselves are cost prohibitive for low-income students, not to mention test prep.
- The requirement should be waived at least for fall 2022. Many students start taking these tests during their senior year of high school.

- There is an ongoing conversation in graduate programs about the GRE as well; at this point, programs can decide for themselves whether to require it, and some have decided not to. However, going test optional without having a system in place to take its place can cause a challenge when reviewing applicants.
- The University's Medical School has chosen to make the MCAT optional going forward.
- The Medical School Boards are going to pass/fail. Board used to be used to place students into residencies. Now it is unclear how residencies will be determined.
- If the Twin Cities campus moved to test optional admissions, there would be much more reliance on the chemistry and math placement tests. In some ways, they are a better predictor, as they are more focused on the University's specific sequences. They are also proximal to when the student is likely to be taking the course sequence at the University.
- High school students may not be well-informed about submitting their scores.

McMaster thanked the committee for their feedback, and said that no immediate decisions on this issue would be made. He remarked that the Board of Regents is also very interested in this topic.

3. P&A on SCEP/SCEP Membership

Chase then turned the discussion to two issues related to SCEP's membership: P&A eligibility for SCEP, and ensuring that there are faculty on the committee with experience advising graduate students. He then turned the floor over to Goodnough, who provided [background](#) on the P&A topic. She shared information about the ratio of P&A to faculty on other Faculty Senate committees, most of which have two seats designated for P&A, and proposed that SCEP follow that pattern. Chase emphasized that all members are valuable contributors, and no one would be asked to leave the committee before their term ends, regardless of what decision was made. Chase offered the following proposed revisions to the current membership statement:

Membership

The Educational Policy Committee shall be composed of:

- ~~12~~ 10 faculty/~~academic professional~~ members;
 - At least 8 members having significant experience advising graduate students,
 - At least 7 tenured members,
 - At least one member from the Morris campus,
- 6 students (including at least one from a system campus), ~~and~~
- 2 ~~academic professional members~~, and
- ex officio representation as specified by vote of the Faculty Senate.

Members shall be appointed by the Committee on Committees. ~~Academic professional members must be eligible to serve in the Faculty Senate.~~ The chair of the committee shall be a tenured faculty member.

The following discussion ensued:

- Toni Abts asked whether the two designated seats would need to be filled by P&A who are eligible for the Faculty Senate. The proposal was that they would not.
- McMaster registered concern about the proposed eight members being required to have significant experience with graduate students, fearing that faculty expertise in undergraduate issues may be lacking in that case.
- Stacy Doepner-Hove felt that two P&A seats is not enough, unless P&A who *are* eligible for the Faculty Senate can fill some of the faculty seats. She commented that two P&A cannot adequately represent the entirety of the University and what P&A do. As a former member of the Committee on Committees, she noted that there were frequently many more P&A interested in serving on this committee than faculty, and that sometimes there were very qualified P&A that they could not seat, because they needed more faculty.
- Members asked about representation from the Rochester campus; Goodnough said that since Rochester is so small, they have very few eligible faculty. Therefore, requiring a representative from Rochester would be problematic, but some of the other faculty or other members could certainly be from Rochester.
- Ety DeVeaux, chair, Committee of Committees, noted that it is important that any requirements be spelled out in the language. She said that SCEP should think about what best serves this committee, and put it into the charge.

Chase said that he would make revisions to the proposal based on this discussion and bring it back to a subsequent meeting.

4. Update on Microcredentials

Chase welcomed Erin Slattengren, assistant to the provost, Office of the executive Vice President and Provost, who updated the committee on discussions around microcredentials. She informed members that in late 2017, the former provost and the University registrar formed a committee on non-credit credentials. This committee has been developing best practices, finding out what different colleges and units are doing, etc. In the next month or two, continued Slattengren, the committee would initiate communication with collegiate leadership on high-level recommendations and best practices. She offered to attend the next SCEP meeting for further discussion. Scott Lanyon recommended inviting Sandy Nelson, business/systems analyst, Academic Support Resources as well.

Chase adjourned the meeting.

Amber Bathke
University Senate Office