

Minutes*

Senate Committee on Educational Policy
Wednesday, April 22, 2009
2:00 – 4:00
238A Morrill Hall

Present: Cathrine Wambach (chair), Joseph Bartolotta, LeAnn Alstadt, Norman Chervany, (George Green for) Gail Dubrow, Megan Evans, April Knutson, James Leger, Kristen Nelson, Peh Ng, Jane Phillips, Paul Siliciano, Donna Spannaus-Martin, Molly Tolzmann, Michael Wade

Absent: Robert McMaster, Erin Sperling, Elaine Tarone

Guests: Tina Falkner, Susan Van Voorhis (Academic Support Resources)

Other: none

[In these minutes: (1) classroom scheduling (Twin Cities); (2) degree-completion data by department; (3) policy changes]

1. Classroom Scheduling (Twin Cities)

Professor Wambach convened the meeting at 2:00 and turned to Mr. Fitzgerald for a brief report from the Office of Classroom Management (OCM).

Mr. Fitzgerald noted that he last met with the Committee about the Fall 2009 schedule just before the production cycle; he wished to provide a five-minute update. He would like to talk to the Committee about some innovations in scheduling that were implemented on the fly during the cycle; to provide feedback on Fall 09 results; to briefly touch upon Spring 2010 scheduling (now in progress) and look to future scheduling in Fall 2010 and some permanent changes in the policy.

OCM tried to make improvements in Fall 2009 even as they were losing the Science Classroom Building and 1701 University Avenue and some other classrooms. The net result of inventory reductions was that they lost 22 classrooms with 1,892 seats for next fall's classes.

He has spoken in the past with the Committee about scheduling and use issues: non-standard classes, departments not spreading classes throughout the day, overuse of Tuesday/Thursdays, underused departmental classrooms, and so on. As he has said in the past, they could improve service to students as well as room use if departments would follow the scheduling policy more closely. He has reviewed with the Provost, this Committee, and every department ways to overcome the loss of classrooms for Fall 2009.

Mr. Fitzgerald addressed Fall 2009 results. OCM coordinated and collaborated with all departments and colleges in a very focused scheduling effort that included extensive manually-

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generated reporting and feedback. The effort has been successful, and the schedule has gone from about 1200 non-standard courses in Fall 2008 to about 550 for next fall, a significant improvement in scheduling that directly improves course access for students. Departments have been more conscientious about conforming to standard time and day patterns and distributing courses across the day. They have pushed some courses into department classrooms and have done a better job of minimizing over-projecting section and enrollment projections. "We as a campus have successfully wrung a bit more utilization out of classrooms," he concluded.

Mr. Fitzgerald noted that over the years OCM has repeatedly had a lot of requests for the option of using the 75-minute Tu - Th 3-credit ("B" scheme) pattern on other days, such as M-W and W-F, but they could not do it because room use was eaten up by non-standard and unevenly-distributed courses. As the Fall 09 schedule development process was in progress, OCM saw an opportunity to respond to this need and to also help unload demand on the over-used Tu - Th schedule. As a result, for Fall 09 and Spring 2010, OCM is offering designated 75-minute, M-W and W-F times as an option, on an experimental basis, which it can do ONLY because of better compliance with the standard class schedule. Did OCM go to instructors who had T-Th classes, Professor Siliciano asked? No, they worked with the schedulers in the larger colleges to broker the option as a solution to the problem of unplaced courses. (Note: the revised Standard Meeting Time chart showing the new pilot "C" times is attached to these minutes)

Mr. Fitzgerald identified the reduction in unplaced courses at start of registration as another major result of the scheduling improvement effort. As he has reported to the Committee in the past, there have been large numbers of unplaced courses at the time students began registering (700-1200), which was a significant problem for students. For the Fall 09 semester the number was about 130, a tremendous improvement for students and a positive outcome from following the scheduling rules.

There was negotiation back and forth with departments but it was a cooperative venture with departments, Mr. Fitzgerald said. But scheduling Fall 09, including many extra processes and pilot innovations such as the M-W and W-F 75-minute classes, is also a very hands-on, manual process that cannot be sustained. It can, however, be institutionalized with the consent of the Committee and incorporated in the electronic scheduling system. A real test, he indicated, will be whether the Fall 09 improvements in departmental schedule submissions continue in the Spring 2010 cycle or whether there is back-sliding. Mr. Fitzgerald will return to the Committee with the data, along with recommendations regarding the policy changes that can make the improvements permanent in Fall 2010 and beyond.

Professor Leger asked what the downsides to the change are. There is a converse relationship between flexibility for departments and standardized class-meeting patterns, Mr. Fitzgerald answered, and they have to balance between the two. This change has reinforced teaching more on Mondays and Fridays and using classroom space more effectively. Some may see it as a downside that departments have less flexibility and more instructors must teach on Fridays.

Ms. Alstadt asked what the regulations are for instructors when they pick a class time. There is a standard matrix of class times that is Senate-approved, Mr. Fitzgerald said, and the Provost has guidelines. For awhile they were not followed, for various reasons. There is some control by the department, Dean Green added; faculty submit course to the scheduler in the department, who must follow the rules from OCM. The department develops a schedule and sends it to OCM; classes that do

not comply with the standard schedule go to the end of the list for placement, so they have the last shot at rooms. Big classes are recurrently scheduled in big rooms so have a "reservation" if they don't try to change the time.

Professor Siliciano said OCM had done a great job with a tough problem. He commended OCM for talking with the colleges; the students in the College of Biological Sciences take a lot of courses from IT, and they try to schedule their courses in concert with IT courses, but there is no mechanism to coordinate between colleges on large classes. And if they are at non-standard times, it is even more difficult, Mr. Fitzgerald added. Step one is to get in conformance with the standard schedule. Step two is cross-college coordination in the sequencing of courses. If they can get the electronic course-scheduling changes, they can begin to address the coordination issue.

Ms. Van Voorhis reported that Vice Provost Jerry Rinehart suggested that because there is no University- or campus-wide curriculum committee, that Mr. Fitzgerald bring in the Council of Undergraduate Deans, because schedule changes do affect the ability of students to get through the University. There are a lot of different cohorts of students, Professor Siliciano observed, and it would help if they could identify ways to coordinate classes for them. Mr. Fitzgerald agreed. Some colleges take a hands-off approach and let departments run things; college-based involvement is important, and he relies on the associate deans. His office should not be intruding on the relationship between individual departments and their college.

Professor Siliciano said that Academic Health Center classrooms should be brought under OCM. Mr. Fitzgerald demurred. The AHC has a unique vertical schedule, he said, where students stay in a room and teachers come and go; to optimize the use of the rooms, it is best that the AHC runs them. OCM does provide a service to all departments in that department-scheduled classrooms use the OCM electronic system, and that includes the AHC rooms.

Professor Wambach thanked Mr. Fitzgerald for experimenting with the M-W and W-F scheduling. What remains on the schedule is policy about development of classrooms in new buildings (some of which have no classrooms): what should be the policy and what is the optimal mix of classrooms, offices, labs, and other spaces? Dean Green asked if OCM has sufficient clout to insist on classrooms in new buildings; it does not, Mr. Fitzgerald said. The problem is that departments and colleges must pay for classrooms, under the budget model, Ms. Van Voorhis pointed out. Then classrooms will constantly lose out when departments are more interested in offices and lab spaces, rather than classrooms they do not control, Dean Green said, and the inventory of classrooms will decline. Classrooms need to be structured into the building-design process.

Professor Wambach thanked Mr. Fitzgerald for his report.

2. Degree-Completion Data by Department

Professor Wambach next turned to Ms. Van Voorhis for a report on degree completion statistics by major.

Ms. Van Voorhis recalled that she had brought degree-completion data to the Committee in the fall by college, and now has assembled the data by major. She distributed copies of several handouts, one of them many pages of data by major.

Ms. Van Voorhis first asked Committee members to look at a table of majors that listed the number of students who graduated in the field in 2007 and the best record for that major ("best" meaning the student who was able to graduate with a least number of credits to earn a degree in that major). The standard University requirement for a baccalaureate degree is 120 credits; what follows is a list of those majors where at least 3 students graduated in 2007 and in which the "best" record was more than 130 credits.

(Number of students graduating in 2007, least number of credits earned for an undergraduate degree, and major)

58	131	Aerospace Engineering
8	136	Agricultural Education
3	175	Architecture
6	133	Astrophysics
3	156	Bioprod & Biosystems Engineering
6	138	Biosystems/Agri Engineering
5	148	Classical Civilization
36	131	Computer Engineering
6	136	Dance
11	149	Forest Resources
8	143	Geological Engineering
6	149	Geology
6	149	Geophysics
5	165	Greek
3	133	Journalism Profl Program
19	134	Materials Science
5	142	Music
5	144	Music Therapy
3	160	Physics (BA)
10	137	Respiratory Care

There are many majors in which the "best" degree was earned in 120 credits and also many in which the "best" was in the 120s but more than 120. These data do not segregate those students who changed majors, Ms. Van Voorhis noted.

The Committee then looked as an example at the record of one student who majored in Mechanical Engineering, on which Ms. Van Voorhis had noted the occasions when the student had double-dipped, or had over-satisfied requirements, or not met major grading requirements. In this case, the catalogue indicates the degree takes 128 credits; in the case of this student, it took 137 credits.

[APAS, below, Academic Progress Audit System, is a report that provides information about degree requirements, courses that fulfill those requirements, and how the courses students have taken satisfy degree requirements for particular programs. Each APAS report indicates how coursework applies to liberal- education and degree requirements for a specific major or college. Dr. Falkner

explained that it is a way for students to see what they need to graduate in a particular major and a way to see where they are in completing the requirements.]

Ms. Van Voorhis next had Committee members consider a table comparing (1) the minimum number of credits required in a major with (2) the actual number required per APAS (assuming a student starts immediately in the field as a freshman), including the liberal education, writing-intensive, freshman composition, second language where required, and major requirements, but without double-dipping. Participation in the University Honors Program adds an additional 18 credits. An additional column on the table indicated the number of electives available to the student (per APAS). A significant percentage (perhaps more than half) of the majors allowed no elective choices (after meeting all the other requirements, but in many cases the liberal education and theme courses may be elective). Ms. Van Voorhis highlighted one major, Early Childhood Education, in the Foundations of Education program, where the catalogue says the degree requires 120 credits but APAS indicates a student must take 169.5 credits to obtain the degree. Several other degree programs have a similar discrepancy.

A multi-page "Degree Progress Summary" received attention next. Ms. Van Voorhis presented, for Spring 2009, for each major, a report presenting the average percentage of all requirements (credits) completed for the degree for third-, fourth-, and fifth-year students (and the number of students and the range of percentage of credits completed) for both those majoring only in that field and for students who are double-majoring. Third-year students started in Fall 2006, fourth-year students started in Fall 2005, etc. The data include more than 8000 degree-seeking students who have declared a major, did not include transfer students, and included only students admitted as New High School (NHS) students.

For example, in one field, there were 38 third-year single-major students; they had on average completed 81% of the credits needed for the degree in that field. There were 14 students in their fourth year; they had completed an average of 101% of the credits needed, and there were 6 fifth-year students who had completed an average of 93% of the required credits. There were 2 students in their seventh (or later) year who had completed an average of 99% of degree requirements. (The data also included students in their sixth year and those in their seventh (or more) year. In another field there were 24 third-year students who had completed 83% of degree requirements (the range was 58% to 103%), 27 fourth-year students who had completed 94% of requirements, 7 fifth-year students who had completed 93%, 1 sixth-year student with 71% of requirements, and 2 students in their seventh or later year who had 91% completed. In many cases, Ms. Van Voorhis pointed out, the range (and SD) of percentage completion is quite large.

Professor Leger commented that if the average completion percentage for third-year students is 75% and the standard deviation is 0, that is great. If the standard deviation is large, there is still a problem. Ms. Van Voorhis agreed and said the data need to be analyzed in greater depth to learn who is and is not on target and why. Professor Wambach wondered why there is such a large standard deviation even for the larger programs; why are there such variable experiences?

Dean Green commented that one would expect students in the more-highly-prescribed programs to be more on track. Ms. Van Voorhis agreed but said that if a student must take prerequisites, that can add time to degree.

If it is true that the typical student has more than one major (that is, changes majors), Professor Chervany said, and it is typical, the University needs to think about its curriculum so that students can change majors and still complete a degree in four years. Changing majors is part of student development and should not be looked at negatively. If the University changes its attitude (doesn't say it's the student's fault for changing majors) and tells students that if they stay the course, the student who makes the typical number of major changes will still be able to get through in four years. That is a philosophical decision, he said.

This report also makes it clear that there are a lot of majors with very small numbers of students, Professor Wambach commented. She questioned how, from a policy perspective, departments can offer an upper division curriculum for small numbers—how do they get the critical mass of students to provide an intellectual focus?

Ms. Van Voorhis returned to the example of Early Childhood Education that she had mentioned earlier, with APAS suggesting that 169.5 credits are required for a degree in that major. She constructed a hypothetical degree program in that major but took advantage of all double-dipping opportunities and found that she could reduce the required number of credits by 59 (which would take her below the 120 required credits for any degree, so a student could add back other credits).

Ms. Van Voorhis also provided copies of a sample plan for Early Childhood Education and a graduation planner guide using the sample plan. The better the sample plans are, the more likely it is that the grad planner will be able to help students.

So one can complete a degree in Early Childhood Education in 120 credits, Ms. Van Voorhis concluded, but only if one selected the major as an incoming freshman and made the right choices. There have been student-athletes who wanted this to be their major but didn't decide until their sophomore year; they had to be told they could not choose it because they would not make satisfactory progress toward their degree (under NCAA rules).

Ms. Van Voorhis distributed finally copies of a degree-requirements and suggested-semester-plan for Early Childhood Education from the University of Oklahoma. It described succinctly the courses needed and suggested semesters in which to enroll in them. Students could face the same problems they do at Minnesota, however, she observed, such as being unable to enroll in a course because they are at the end of the registration queue. Ms. Alstadt said she found the Oklahoma template more confusing, compared to the grad planner here, and noted that the Oklahoma plan also requires students to take more credits per semester.

What is the take-away message, Professor Wambach asked? When she saw the 169.5 credit requirement in the one field, Ms. Van Voorhis said, she decided to try to reduce it to close to 120. That can be done, but a student must choose the major immediately. Does the University want to require that decision, or tell students what they must do? Departments should be told what they have discovered but that the path to a degree is not mapped out for students. She said she would like to keep investigating the data and to look at the status of the current third-year students at the end of next year to see where they are—and if they are not at 100%, figure out why not.

Professor Ng reported that she has advisees, in mathematics education, who sometimes exceed 130-140 credits because the State Board of Education changes the rules every few years. Students in

their junior and senior year thus discover they need extra credits to obtain the certification they need. Ms. Van Voorhis agreed that such changes will affect students, although seniors are usually grandfathered; curriculum changes may require extra credits, and at the University, changing majors will as well. If one is not officially admitted to a major, Dean Green observed, a student could go half way down the wrong road before learning of curriculum changes.

Departments will also need to look at how the new liberal-education requirements will affect their majors, Ms. Van Voorhis said. She said she is nervous about their impact, especially on double-dipping, and departments will need to update their sample plans. There could also be a problem when the new requirements mean core courses that previously incorporated one of the themes is now unable to do so. Ms. Phillips reported that the change has affected Biology 1001 (it no longer meets the Environment theme) and chemistry faces the same issue. Ms. Phillips said that the bar for offering a theme in a course has been set high. So there is need to look at the whole curriculum, Ms. Van Voorhis commented. She asked an expert on APAS how the new liberal-education requirements would affect students; she was told they would be OK. Departments and colleges, however, will still need to review their curricula to be sure that the degree plans are workable. If there is far less double-dipping available, that will affect a lot of students, Dean Green said, and they may not recognize that the cost of a major went up. Ms. Van Voorhis agreed and said she has asked that that information be made available to departments. CLE has indicated it does not wish to have an impact on majors. If CLE is only approving courses without looking at the impact on the graduation rate, they are doing something wrong, Dean Green said. Vice Provost McMaster will look at these issues next year, Ms. Van Voorhis said. Could the liberal-education requirements change, Dean Green asked? Or the major requirements, Ms. Van Voorhis said—they just do not know yet.

Professor Wambach asked if the deans have seen these data. Ms. Van Voorhis said that Vice Provost McMaster will bring it to the undergraduate deans. If every department did what she did, taking the degree requirements and worked with the grad planner to create a plan, it could be revealing for the departments, Professor Wambach said. Is it possible for them to get dummy log-ins so they could try to create such plans? Her office would work with departments to allow them to do it, Ms. Van Voorhis said.

Ms. Phillips returned to the issue of changing majors. Everyone probably agrees, she said, that changing from Art to engineering would be difficult if it came late in the student's career. But it should be easy for a student to move around after his or her freshman year within the humanities or within the sciences—within clusters of majors. That is true for IT, Professor Leger said. Ms. Van Voorhis agreed but repeated that some programs want the liberal-education courses threaded throughout the four years while some want them completed in the first two years. Any program that has electives will be easier for students to change to; the fewer the electives, the more difficult the change for the student.

Professor Chervany said that if a student projects ahead and could do a degree in four years, what is the frequency of schedule conflicts he or she would face? Ms. Van Voorhis said it is a legitimate question and she would like to look, for example, at third-year students who have completed fewer than 60% of the requirements—is that because of schedule conflicts? Professor Wambach asked the student members of the Committee if they had had the problem; Ms. Tolzmann said she usually has alternative courses to choose from so it hasn't been a problem. Students in more-structured majors have fewer options, Dean Green said, and they can graduate in four years but they

are not allowed to sample other fields without double-dipping. If they must finish in four years, and must double-dip, they will end up taking courses they do not want. It is important not to lose track of the need for flexibility and for students to be able to spread their wings. A good student, after one year, cannot go into Elementary Education unless he or she got lucky in double dipping, Ms. Van Voorhis observed. Dean Green said he would not like the University to say to students that they must change their life goals because they cannot get their degree in four years. Professor Chervany, noting the large number of programs that have no electives, said there should be a policy requiring that every major permit a student electives.

There is a much bigger problem that the University cannot solve, Professor Wade said, and that is that there are students who come who should not be here. They did not get a good high-school education, must take two years of liberal-education rehab, and then face a challenge their last two years. That is an intractable problem.

Professor Leger said he has been concerned for a long time about the liberal-education requirements and the control over who allows what courses to carry what number of credits. Can this Committee talk with the chair of the Council on Liberal Education? It would be more difficult to go to majors and talk to them about what they can drop, Professor Siliciano commented. Professor Leger noted that engineering was originally a five-year program that has been compressed into four years. There is tension between technical requirements for accreditation and the desire to give students flexibility and options, Professor Wambach said. If there is a broad range of attractive liberal-education courses, that tension can be reduced.

Ms. Van Voorhis said one problem they face is identifying double-dip courses for the majors without going to each of the majors and asking. She has asked the AAU schools about double – dipping and is slowly receiving responses. Professor Nelson, who serves on CLE, said they are seeing two themes with problems: the environment (they are not approving enough courses) and technology & society (it did not exist before and CLE is not seeing entrepreneurial offerings, so students will need to go outside their majors to fulfill the requirement).

Professor Wambach thanked Ms. Van Voorhis for a wonderful analysis. There is much to chew on, she said: the size of majors, the SD, the effect of changing majors, the effect of the new liberal-education requirements, and department vigilance about what they publish and what courses are actually available to students. Who will tell the departments about these data, Dr. Knutson asked? Vice Provost McMaster, Ms. Van Voorhis responded, who meets with the associate deans—but not yet because the liberal-education courses are not done yet.

Professor Wambach asked if the Committee should recommend that colleges monitor progress to degree data. These data need to be part of the picture, Ms. Van Voorhis said. Dean Green asked how they could monitor degree progress for the first two years if students do not declare a major until they are juniors, except for liberal-education requirements. They can't, Ms. Van Voorhis agreed.

Professor Wambach thanked Ms. Van Voorhis for the report and said the Committee will need to review the information more closely to determine if there are policy recommendations needed.

3. Policy Changes

Professor Wambach next reported that suggestions for small policy changes have already been made. The Student Academic Integrity Committee has recommended minor changes in one; a question has also been raised about the amount of academic work per credit required for the May and summer session courses. In the case of the latter, the Committee agreed without significant discussion that "a credit is a credit is a credit" and the total amount of work required per credit during May and summer terms should be same as that required during fall and spring semester. Professor Wambach suggested this clarification be put in the FAQ for the policy; the Committee concurred.

Ms. Phillips raised a question about the Wednesday evenings before Thanksgiving: there are evening courses but the campus essentially shuts down. Buildings are locked and services are closed. Many of those courses only meet once per week, so it is not a trivial question. Dean Green observed that the problem of missing a day of instruction happens with Monday classes as well because holidays are often scheduled on Mondays. So only Tuesday classes meet every week, Professor Wambach concluded, because Thursday and Friday are lost during Thanksgiving weekend. She said the Committee needs more information about the number of classes affected.

On the issue of final examinations, Professor Wambach said, one colleague suggested it would be useful to do a survey of final examination processes; she said she would work on creating a survey about final exam expectations. She asked Committee members for suggestions. Professor Chervany asked that Professor Wambach draft a survey and circulate it to the Committee for comments.

Professor Wambach adjourned the meeting at 3:50.

-- Gary Engstrand

University of Minnesota