Minutes*

Senate Committee on Educational Policy
Wednesday, November 28, 2007
1:30 – 3:30
238A Morrill Hall

Present: Cathrine Wambach (chair), LeAnn Alstadt, (George Green for) Gail Dubrow, John Kieffer, James Leger, Richard McCormick, Claudia Neuhauser, Peh Ng, Jane Phillips, Emily Ronning, Paul Siliciano, Donna Spannaus-Martin, Craig Swan, Molly Tolzmann, Douglas Wangensteen

Absent: William Bart, April Knutson, Joel Weinsheimer, David Zeller

Guests: Professor Thomas Shield (Chair, Student Academic Integrity Committee), Sharon Dzik (Director, Student Academic Integrity office); Frank Blalark, Tina Falkner (Office of the Registrar), Becky Hippert (University Senate office)

[In these minutes: (1) the immutable F and replacing an F with an N by bracketing the F; (2) Ws and related matters]

1. The Immutable F & Replacing an F with an N by Bracketing the F

Professor Wambach convened the meeting at 1:35 and welcomed Professor Shield and Ms. Dzik to the meeting to discuss two proposals, both of which come from the Student Academic Integrity Committee (SAIC).

Professor Shield provided a handout and told the Committee that as director of undergraduate education for his department, he received a call from a student who reported he had an F in a course and proposed to retake the course S/N and obtain an N in order to wipe out the F. The F would be bracketed on the transcript, after he retook the course, and would no longer count in the student's GPA. With the flat tuition charge above 13 credits, it would cost the student nothing to re-register for the course and take the N. [Note: current Senate policy on awarding an F for academic dishonesty, and on Ws, discussed later in these minutes, is appended.]

As chair of SAIC, that led him to think about what would happen if a student were assigned an F for academic dishonesty and about issues of bracketing courses and what impact it has on the F and N grades. Presumably a student could re-register for a course in that case as well and eliminate the F. If an instructor gives an F for academic dishonesty, presumably he or she wants the penalty to stick. The fact that N does not count in the GPA is the problem. If two students are taking a course, one A/F and one S/N, and both are found to have cheated, that the student registered A/F receives a stronger punishment if awarded an F compared to the student who is awarded an N. If a student who received the F for academic dishonesty must retake the course in order to meet degree requirements, should the new grade replace the F earned because of academic dishonesty?

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

As a consequence of this situation, SAIC is recommending to this Committee that the grading policy be changed to add a new grade, the "immutable F." "It should have the following properties: carry zero grade points; cannot be bracketed when the course is re-taken, (that is, it always counts in the GPA; if the student had previously withdrawn from the course, this grade overrides the withdrawal (a partial implementation of CLA's policy, which SAIC will give a recommendation on in its entirety shortly); [and] show on the student's transcript as an 'F' grade regardless of grade basis."

The handout also explained that "the purpose of this grade is not to mark the reason for the F grade on the student's transcript, but instead to make the penalties for academic dishonesty permanent and consistent. It will also provide another means of obtaining reporting on academic dishonesty because it will have to be stored in PeopleSoft separately from an F grade." Internal staff and advisors would know, but not others.

The Council of Undergraduate Deans (CUD) advised that the process must be transparent and that all know what is going on. When a student is given an immutable F, there should be automatic notification to the student and information about the right to start an appeal through the academic integrity office, with a copy to the instructor so he or she knows the grade was given (to avoid mistakes) and to the academic integrity office.

There was discussion about whether or not a separate policy is needed. SAIC decided not, and did not wish to obviate the usual procedures. They also did not want a lot of legalese (e.g., a "do you really want to do this?" pop-up on the screen which could discourage faculty from giving the grade.

Ms. Dzik said that some faculty probably believe that an F grade for dishonesty will stick and not realize a student can retake the course S/N to bracket the F. In general, she said, faculty mean it when they go through the process to give a student an F for academic dishonesty. Professor Shield added that the immutability of the F does not apply to the instructor, who can change his or her mind about the grade.

Is the immutable F only to be used for academic dishonesty, Professor Leger asked? He said that he worries that instructors might use it for other reasons. Their motivation is to address academic dishonesty, Professor Shield said. The broader issues fall under the purview of this Committee—what the instructor needs to know, what the grade means. That is why CUD took the position that people must know what it means. Dean Green echoed Professor Leger's concern about inappropriate use of the immutable F. If there is an automatic email to the student informing him or her about the grade, Professor Shield said, and the student believes it was assigned for the wrong reason, the student has the right to appeal.

Professor Neuhauser asked how a course is bracketed. (Literally, on the transcript.) If so, she said, if a student receives an F in a course, and takes the course again but the initial F is not bracketed, anyone looking at the transcript would know that the original F was for academic dishonesty. Professor Shield pointed out that a student must sign to release a transcript. That is not optional if the student is applying for a graduate or professional school, Professor Neuhauser rejoined. Dr. Falkner said this process would amount to releasing a judicial-related matter on a transcript. The only way one would know, Ms. Dzik said, is if a student takes the same course twice and the first grade is not bracketed.

Professor Neuhauser maintained that if a student comes as a freshman and takes a required course, and cheats, she would be troubled by the severity of this proposal. Students make mistakes, and the mistake would be recorded forever. Professor Shield observed that an F on a transcript lasts forever now, whether bracketed or not.

Ms. Phillips related that she serves on the Campus Committee on Student Behavior and has chaired the President's Student Behavior Review Panel, and said her concern is that students appeal the response of the faculty member as inappropriate but there are no comparisons across faculty. In one case it could be a small slip by a student while in another it could be blatant cheating. There is no objective standard and the proposal can vary with the value system of the faculty member teaching a course.

Professor Ng said she reached a conclusion similar to that of Professor Neuhauser and Ms. Phillips, and had another question as well. If a student receives an immutable F, it stays on the transcript. If a student repeats the course and receives another grade, how is the GPA calculated? Professor Shield said that the two grades would count and credits for the course both times would also be counted. What happens if a student takes a course and receives a C, and then retakes it and receives an A, Professor Wambach asked? How is that calculated? Dr. Falkner said both grades show, the first one is bracketed, and only the second grade and credits count in calculation of the GPA. The same is true, she added, if a student receives a C and retakes the course and receives an F.

Professor Wambach asked Ms. Dzik how many immutable Fs she believes would be given in a year. Ms. Dzik said she believes a lot of faculty do not report academic dishonesty. Her office had 140 cases last year, about 40 of which led to an F grade. Those numbers are incredibly low compared to survey results of student self-reports (70% of students said they had cheated, so either they are not being caught or incidents are not being reported). Or the faculty decide the infraction is minor, not worthy of an F, so they give the student a C or a D, Dean Green said.

Dean Green's comment prompted Professor Siliciano to inquire if instructors are supposed to report any time they reduce a grade, or give a zero, for academic dishonesty, even if the behavior is not a major violation. They are, Ms. Dzik said. Doing so addresses the problem of the accumulating benefit of the doubt, Dr. Swan said; they can only know if a student is repeatedly cheating if the incidents are reported. Ms. Dzik said she knows it is not easy; she is teaching a freshman seminar and it sometimes hard to decide if something is academic dishonesty. Faculty have a lot of discretion and her office urges them to talk to the student because some really do not know they have done anything wrong while others are knowingly cheating. What they should not do is let the matter slide.

At this juncture Dr. Falkner introduced Frank Blalark from her office, who noted the distinction between intent and impact. The immutable F is more severe than a regular F and it does reveal the outcome of judicial proceedings. The decisions can also be arbitrary across disciplines.

Ms. Ronning asked if an instructor could assign an immutable F without going through Ms. Dzik's office. Professor Shield said there would only be a process to be used if the student appeals, but the student should automatically be informed about an immutable F, regardless of whether Ms. Dzik's office is informed. At present an instructor can give an F for academic dishonesty and the

student is not notified that he or she can appeal. The decision is not grievable, Dean Green pointed out.

Professor Neuhauser suggested that it would make a more lasting impression on a student if he or she were made to do community work, for example, after receiving an F for cheating. The problem with the immutable F is that it is a penalty that lasts forever, even for a 17-year-old who made a mistake. Professor Shield said that at one institution that gives an FX grade (an F for cheating); it can be taken off the transcript if the student takes an ethics course.

Ms. Dzik said she appreciated all the comments that have been made and reported that many colleges and universities do treat an F for cheating differently from a regular F. One issue before this Committee today, however, is the ability to retake a course S/N in order to bracket the F. There is an intermediate solution, Professor Shield: Locking the grade base. Students would not be permitted to take a course on a different grade base (i.e., if a student took a course A/F and received an F, and wished to retake it, he or she would have to enroll A/F again).

Ms. Dzik recalled the report of the Clayton Committee, which was appointed after the men's basketball scandal that involved term papers being written for athletes; the report included a strong recommendation to create a culture that does not tolerate academic misconduct but also included a sense that a penalty should not affect a student forever. An F for a freshman for plagiarizing two sentences and an F for a senior in journalism for plagiarism are very different.

Ms. Alstadt said locking the grade base was a good idea. She also suggested letting an immutable F show up as normal but notifying the student that it is different.

One of the "cons" of the proposal for the immutable F, Ms. Dzik observed, is that it might inhibit faculty reporting even more, if they knew that was the penalty to be given. Because it could be too severe, Dr. Swan agreed. Professor Shield pointed out that nothing requires an instructor to give an immutable F, but he has had students for whom he preferred that the penalty stick.

Why not an FX grade, Professor Leger asked, which the student can make up?

Professor Shield said he did not see a FERPA issue involved (referring to the federal law governing release of private student data). If a student signs a release for a transcript, the information is released. The question has been raised here if the F should be forever; his view is that if grades are given for a reason, they should stick.

Do other institutions do things—FX, an immutable F—that work, Dr. Swan asked? They have not looked into what others do, Ms. Dzik reported. Professor Wambach asked if it would be technically possible to implement the immutable F; Dr. Falkner thought it would but said she did not know what the cost would be to revise the system or how long it would take.

Professor Wambach said there seemed to be a sense that the immutable F would satisfy some faculty feelings about cheating and about the need for the grade to be permanent, but that others do not want students "outed," and the cost of the change is not known. Are there data on student repeats, she asked? There are, Ms. Dzik said.

Professor Siliciano said the response of an instructor depends on the severity of the violation. There are some academic violations that he would like to see prevent someone from going to medical school, for example. After some violations, the University can kick a student out, Professor Neuhauser observed. In egregious cases, faculty want to do more than just give an F that may disappear, Dean Green said. Dr. Falkner said that professional schools will learn about any incidents because they ask if a student has a judicial file. Ms. Dzik reported that her office receives over 400 requests for information per year from medical schools, law schools, and the FBI. So in those cases, there are consequences, Dean Green said, but not many employers or graduate schools make that kind of request.

What matters to him, Dean Green said, is if the University catches repeaters and can deal with them in a punitive and "major reorientation" way. Ms. Dzik has heard a lot of stories, he said, and he has seen extreme examples of students who are explicit about doing whatever they can if they can get away with it.

Professor Wambach said that she did not sense strong Committee support for the immutable F. Dean Green said it is not the right tool and has awkward side effects. Professor Leger urged that the FX option be considered again. Should the Committee continue to pursue something, Professor Wambach inquired? Ms. Dzik said they can look into what other schools are doing and how they feel their system has worked, and also look into educational options rather than simply punitive steps. Professor Shield asked that information also be gathered about the cost of adding ANY grade to the system.

Professor Wambach asked that information about numbers also be provided; if there are only a few cases, it would not be worth a major policy change. Ms. Dzik responded that if there were more reporting of smaller cases (reducing a grade on a paper, and so on), there would be less need for consideration of this kind of proposal.

Professor Shield reminded the Committee that regardless of any action predicated on additional information, the N for cheating carries no penalty for the student. Dean Green said he would not want to see the N eliminated as a different grade base but agreed it should not be used as an escape clause. Perhaps it could not be bracketed. Vice Provost Swan said that then one can argue that a student should not be able to bracket a D with an N, either. In CLA, Ms. Dzik reported, a student may not take a W in a course if he or she has been accused of cheating. She suggested that policy require that a student who is found to have cheated may not receive an N in a course. That would mean changing the grade base for students who had enrolled S/N, Professor Shield pointed out. Professor Neuhauser said that if a student takes a course, receives an F, then takes it again and receives an N, the F is bracketed but it is still on the transcript. Any serious hiring agency will look carefully at those transcript entries. Mr. Kieffer agreed; he said he is doing an internship and in 99% of the cases he is familiar with, the hiring agent would look at the transcript and ask why an F was later recorded as an N.

Professor Wambach said the Committee would return to this topic later in the year.

Dr. Falkner said she would gather data on the number of times an F is bracketed for an N. If it is very small, perhaps there is no need for a policy. She also said she would like to review the CLA policy that does not allow a W if a student is accused of cheating. If there are differences across

colleges, this may be a case where the practices should be brought into alignment, Dr. Swan observed. Ms. Dzik agreed that such uniformity would be helpful.

Professor Wambach thanked the guests for their report and recommendation.

2. Ws and Related Matters

Professor Wambach next noted that she had sent to Committee members materials related to Withdrawals. Both Ws and cancels are wasteful for the institution: students who are course-shopping take seats that are then not available to students who wanted to take the course. With the University's tuition structure, there is no penalty for doing so. She said she sees a number of students who enroll for a lot of credits and then decide about the 4th or 5th week which ones they will drop.

The Committee was provided data (fall, 2007) on the number of courses in which students take Ws. Of freshmen, 5563 took none, 296 took 1, 41 took 2, 9 took 3, and 1 each took 4, 5, 6, and 7 Ws. For seniors (4th, 5th, and 6th-year students), 5440 took none, 2659 took 1, 940 took 2, 374 took 3, 175 took 4, 83 took 5, and smaller numbers took more than 5 (including one who took 21). Professor Wambach reported that the data do not include students who have left the University; they would be larger if done by cohort.

Clifford Adelman has examined the data on student persistence and degree completion and argues that Ws have a big impact on both during the first couple of semesters of enrollment. They are a symptom, not a cause, Dean Green said. Eliminating the W policy could make things worse, Professor Leger added. The W policy does not deal with the cause, Dean Green said, such as family problems, financial problems, or other behaviors—students who face those will drop out whether or not there is any change in the W policy.

Professor Neuhauser said the Committee could adopt a rule requiring that if a student has too many Ws, he or she must talk with someone (e.g., more than 3 Ws).

Dr. Swan reported that in Texas, state law provides that a student may have no more than 6 Ws. Dr. Swan agreed that one could look at entering cohorts to see what the totals were. There are multiple dimensions to a W policy, and while he is not sure the University has a perfect policy, some schools set limits on use of the W, which might be rational. Another variation is the period of time within which a student can take a W without formal review. (By the standards of the CIC, Minnesota is pretty generous, giving seven weeks; two weeks is more common.) UCLA has a differentiated W policy: a student may not take a W after the second week in high-demand courses.

Could the University have a policy requiring students to drop a course in the first week but allowing them to add courses through the second week, Professor Wambach asked? That would allow students to add a course, but they cannot come in much later than that. Dr. Swan said it would be possible but he didn't know how much it would cost. Professor McCormick said he believed that could be a reasonable proposal, given the complete autonomy of the student, who could still take a W later, but only if he or she talked with someone. Talking might also provide help to a student so he or she would not just take the W, so a LESS accommodating policy might be better for students, Ms. Ronning said. At the same time, students can be asked about the number of hours they are working, etc., Dean Green said, and about thinking about time working and studying.

In response to a question about what policy change was being discussed, Professor Wambach said she wished the Committee to brainstorm on the issue: is this a policy problem? An advising problem? Would a policy change be a tool to identify students who need to get help in making better choices? There is also an institutional impact when students take Ws, because students cannot get courses they need or want; if students would drop earlier, that could free up seats. There are two parts to the issue, the efficiency concern and the need to get help to students before the 8th week of classes. Ms. Ronning said she liked the idea of opening classes to more students, but limiting the drop period to one week would be a problem because in some courses one does not have the lab until the second week.

Professor Neuhauser said she preferred giving students two weeks rather than one because it often takes two weeks to decide. If the policy is to be changed, she maintained it should be only for high-demand courses where a lot of students drop. She said the policy also should not allow students to go eight weeks without talking to anyone before taking a W. Ms. Phillips, however, said there is a question about whether advisors could see a student at the right time, given the large student-advisor ratios in some colleges. That should not control policy, Dean Green contended. The Committee should adopt a policy it believes will help students, not not adopt it because a college staff can't handle it. Either the policy can be phased in or the Provost can be asked for help.

This should be an advisor issue and not just at the time a student wants to take a W, Professor Leger said. Professor Wambach said the system should flag Ws so that advisors talk to students to help them change direction before the next semester. Is an automatic message to advisors possible? That depends on when in the semester a student withdraws, Professor McCormick said; after a certain point, a student should have to talk to an advisor to obtain approval. That would be a deterrent. Right now that date is the 8th week, Dr. Falkner said. Dean Green said he would prefer to see it backed up to the 6th week. Peer schools are all over the board, Dr. Falkner reported; the University is in the middle of the pack. Several of them do protect high-demand courses. She said she can collect information about what institutions do.

A related matter, Dr. Falkner said, is the ability of a student to repeat a course from which he or she has withdrawn. Some advisors believe that unless a student finishes a course, he or she can keep re-enrolling and taking Ws. The Committee could consider a policy providing that a W counts as an attempt to take a course.

Ms. Phillips said it would depend on what the W was for. If a student had to drop a course for disability reasons, for example, it should not be counted as an attempt. Would such a student be working with someone who would know about the situation, Ms. Ronning asked? Professor Leger expressed doubt anyone would know, especially if it were something like depression. If the student could work with someone, that would help, Ms. Ronning said. What about a WX, Mr. Blalark said, given for extenuating circumstances?

Professor Neuhauser said she would like to know the number of students who take 3Ws before they complete a course. There are some students who need to take a course more than once. Professor Wambach said her concern is students who take and retake calculus or chemistry, fixated on a career that is not appropriate for them: if the pattern can be disrupted, the students can be redirected and helped so they do not leave the University with their plans unfulfilled. They need to talk to someone,

and if they need permission to take a course a second time, that would deal with Ms. Phillips's concern. Professor Neuhauser said there are stumbling blocks for a lot of students who ultimately do well, and if they show perseverance in their goal, the University should let them. Professor Ng reported that she had a student who took calculus the first time and received an F and a D the second time; if given another opportunity, the student would have done better.

Professor McCormick said his first reaction is "how many?" Professor Wambach points to a pocket of students who are hard to reach and who are part of the University's problem with graduation rates, a group that does not get good advising so they can figure out where they belong. He said he didn't know if the W policy is the way to get at the problem. The larger question is advising resources, although he was not sure where to go with that point. The situation is similar to the one the Committee saw last year with some student-athletes: they had enough credits but gave up on graduation. The big problem is advising capacity.

Professor Wambach asked if it is right for the University to allow a student to continue to use financial aid and repeat courses, but end up with an N after four years and having used up available financial aid. That is an advising issue, Professor Neuhauser maintained, and related to K-12 education. Students don't go back and take the math they need before they enroll in calculus. She surmised the problem affects a very small number of students and argued against a blanket policy. If a student needs to take a course twice to learn the materials, that is OK.

There is Senate policy that a student may retake a course once, but it is not being followed because some interpret a W as not counting, Professor Wambach said. The University does have policies on the W, Dr. Swan said, which help frame institutional expectations, and talking with advisors is very important. There should be exceptions, but the policy is important to frame institutional expectations. He said, however, that he believes the policy is ambiguous on whether a W should count in the rule on repeating a course. Professor McCormick suggested that because a student receives a W when withdrawing after the 8th week, that constitutes an attempt to take a course. Professor Neuhauser agreed that at some point it should be counted as an attempt, and the rule can reasonably be different for high-demand courses. She asked what the students think.

Mr. Kieffer said that many students stop going to a class the third week but don't drop it until the eighth week, and some wait until the 15th week to drop. Ms. Tolzmann said many classes do not have real assignments until week six, so students drop in weeks four or five and have not done any work yet. (This statement provoked an exclamation of surprise from Ms. Phillips.) But a student may think he or she is understanding the course, take a test, and then realize not, so drop it. There is a difference between courses with only a mid-term and a final and those with work every week, Ms. Alstadt said.

Professor Wambach said she did not sense any sentiment to change the W policy. Dr. Falkner said she can bring information about high-demand courses and also from AAU schools on course access. Professor Wambach said that she would like to see a student required to talk with an advisor before taking a course a third time and permission required. That would not eliminate the students Professor Neuhauser mentioned; they could make the case to the advisor that they are committed to learning the materials in the course. Professor Neuhauser agreed.

Dr. Swan said he would ask the colleges to share their perceptions of the issue. One problem is that if a student wants to register for X, and permission is required, the process could degrade the registration system because the student would wait, and wait, while it checked. Imposing a requirement has the potential to have an adverse effect on practice. So the current policy is not enforced, Professor Wambach commented. Dr. Falkner said there is no system hold, but there could be advisor holds on a student's record.

Professor Wambach thanked everyone and adjourned the meeting at 3:30.

-- Gary Engstrand

University of Minnesota

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Senate Policy on Awarding an F for Academic Dishonesty

Academic dishonesty in any portion of the academic work for a course shall be grounds for awarding a grade of F or N for the entire course. This provision allows instructors to award an F or an N to a student when academic dishonesty is discovered; it does not require an instructor to do so.

Students who enroll for a course on the A-F grading system shall receive an F if such grade is warranted; students who enroll for a course on the S-N system shall receive an N if such grade is warranted.

Senate Policies on W Grades

4. If a student officially withdraws from a course during the first two weeks of classes, there shall be no record of that course registration entered on the student's transcript.

There shall be a symbol W, **withdrawal**, entered upon a student's record when the student officially withdraws from a course in accordance with procedures established by the student's college or campus. The W will be entered on the transcript irrespective of the student's academic standing in that course if the student withdraws from the course during the third through eighth week of class (second or third weeks of summer sessions). Withdrawal in the ninth or later week of classes (fourth or later in summer sessions) shall require approval of the college and may not be granted solely because a student is failing the course; there must extenuating non-academic circumstances justifying late withdrawal.

Each student may, once during his or her undergraduate enrollment, withdraw from a course without college approval, and receive the transcript symbol W, after the eighth week of class and at any time up to and including the last day of class for that course.

2. An undergraduate student may repeat a course once. When a student repeats a course, (a) both grades for the course shall appear on the official transcript, (b) the course credits may not be counted more than once toward degree and program requirements, and (c) only the last enrollment for the course shall count in the student's grade point average. The preceding sentence of this policy shall not

apply to courses using the same number but where students study different content each term of enrollment; all such courses falling under this provision must be approved by the college. If an undergraduate student repeats a course after his/her degree has been awarded, the original course grade will not be excluded from the degree GPA nor will the new grade be included in the degree GPA, as provided in Section IV (1) of this policy. When students enrolled in the Graduate School repeat a course, provisions (a) and (b) apply but not (c); both grades for the course shall be counted in the student's grade point average.