

Minutes*

Senate Committee on Educational Policy
Wednesday, October 9, 2002
1:00 – 3:00
238A Morrill Hall

Present: Martin Sampson (chair), Wilbert Ahern, (Shirley Nelson Garner for) Victor Bloomfield, Dale Branton, Vernon Cardwell, Shawn Curley, Scott Ferguson, Gretchen Haas, Sheryl Lazarus, Marsha Odom, Karen Seashore, Mary Ellen Shaw, Mary Sue Simmons, Craig Swan, Douglas Wangensteen

Absent: Frank Kulacki, Carol Miller

Guests: Karen Zentner Bacig (Office of the Executive Vice President and Provost)

[In these minutes: (1) policy on degrees with honor/with distinction; (2) exams for credit/proficiency; (3) disposition of Incompletes for students who graduate; (4) subcommittees and charges; (5) changes in teaching award policies]

Professor Sampson convened the meeting at 1:05 and welcomed new student member Sheryl Lazarus, a graduate student in Educational Policy and Administration.

1. Amend Policy on Degrees with Honors/with Distinction

Professor Sampson turned to Ms. VanVoorhis for a recommendation on the policy on degrees with distinction and with honors. Ms. VanVoorhis distributed a handout with the following proposal:

For Degrees with Distinction, the policy will read that a student must achieve a cumulative GPA of 3.750 to graduate "with distinction" and a cumulative GPA of 3.900 to graduate "with high distinction." For Degrees with Honors the policy will read that a student must achieve a minimum cumulative GPA of 3.500 to graduate "cum laude," a 3.666 to graduate "magna cum laude," and a 3.750 to graduate "summa cum laude."

The change is that it adds a third digit after the decimal point to the degree requirements, which brings the policy into alignment with the way grade averages are computed in PeopleSoft. There is no change in the requirements themselves, but this avoids the odd case when a student might have a 3.499 on the transcript but would, if the number were rounded for the purposes of the policy, have a 3.50 and qualify for a degree cum laude. So, Professor Sampson observed, a student with a 3.899 does not qualify for a degree with high distinction. There is always a problem when one must draw a line, Dr. Swan observed, but with two digits in the policy and three digits on the transcript, there is room for problems and the two should be brought into line.

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

Without further ado the Committee voted unanimously to approve the change and to report it to the Senate for information as an Interpretation.

2. Exams for Credits and Proficiency

Ms. VanVoorhis next distributed copies of proposed changes in the policy governing exams for credits and for proficiency. The changes have been endorsed by the Registrar's Advisory Committee, the Council of Undergraduate Deans, and coordinate campus registrar representatives and represent an attempt to make the policy more consistent across campuses. Language inside [] and { } would be added; language in CAPS would be deleted. Ms. VanVoorhis's explanations of the changes follow each paragraph. Policy language (existing and proposed) is contained within quotation marks.

"The University of Minnesota offers "proficiency examinations" and "special examinations for credit" [to currently registered undergraduate degree-seeking students] which are given at the discretion of the appropriate academic department. In addition, the University, with the concurrence of the appropriate academic department, also recognizes and awards credits based on examinations which are taken as a part of the Advanced Placement program, the International Baccalaureate Program, and CLEP program. [Once special exam credit has been awarded, the credits will remain on the student's transcript, unless the credit was awarded in error]."

The first change, requiring that students be currently registered, is proposed because non-degree-seeking students enroll just to obtain the credits, which they then transfer to another institution. The colleges do not want this practice to occur.

The second change is proposed because sometimes advisors want to remove special exam credit from a student's transcript because the student is approaching the maximum number of credits he or she may take and still receive financial aid (184 semester credits).

"1. Proficiency Examinations shall be administered by the appropriate academic department, require no fee, and yield no credit or grade, [but may fulfill prerequisites for advanced courses or satisfy requirements]. Proficiency examinations may be taken at any time, and if the student's work is of passing quality, a notation shall be made on his/her transcript saying "Course X satisfied by proficiency examination." [A student may not first take a University of Minnesota course and earn a grade and then subsequently take a proficiency exam for that course content and then request that the original course be bracketed from the transcript.]"

There have been cases when a student fails a course and then takes a proficiency or special examination to pass the course--and asks that the F be bracketed. This change would not allow that to occur.

Professor Sampson suggested that the second change in brackets also be applicable in the case of special examinations for credit: a student might choose not to finish a course and instead later take a special examination and ask that the original grade be bracketed. That would mean an I and F are treated the same. Ms. VanVoorhis agreed and said she would make the change in the policy. Dr.

Swan pointed out, however, that if a student receives an I, there is supposed to be a contract on what the student needs to do to complete a course.

"2. Examinations for Credit shall be without fee if taken during the student's first term in residence or the first term after an absence of a year or more, otherwise a fee will be charged. Credits earned by examination shall not count as residence credits."

"A student must do "C" quality work on an "examination for credit" to earn credit, and a notation shall be placed on the transcript showing the course and credits earned. THE DEPARTMENT AWARDEDING THE CREDIT BY EXAMINATION SHALL DETERMINE WHETHER OR NOT A GRADE IS TO BE ASSIGNED. [Effective fall 1999, examinations for credit earn the letter "T." These credits will be included in the cumulative credits (but not term credits) but the "T" grade will not be reflected in either the term or cumulative grade point average.] If the student fails to do "C" quality work on the examination, no notation shall be made on the transcript."

Ms. VanVoorhis said eliminating the language (in caps) would ensure consistency across units. To allow grades also means they would have to make entries twice on student transcripts.

Professor Cardwell pointed out that with the change to plus-minus grading, the policy should provide for C- work. Professor Odom said she thought that the Committee agreed students should have a C in courses like this. Dr. Swan said the Committee proposed that students need a C in major courses but students argued that a C- was a C, even if not a good one, and the Committee agreed--noting at the same time that it was possible for a student to earn C- grades in every course in the major (and higher grades outside the major) and be able to graduate, since the University's graduation requirement is a 2.0. Dr. Swan pointed out that while this is a possibility, the University has yet to identify a student with this sort of record. A C- is also an S, Dr. Shaw noted. Professor Branton said that because passing a proficiency exam with at least C or C- quality work is required, even though the exam does not earn credit implicit in the policy, the proficiency exams are implicitly a prerequisite exemption. That is correct, Ms. VanVoorhis said.

Are there problems if a special examination for credit IN THE MAJOR carries no grade, Dr. Shaw asked? The CREDIT can be used; there is just no grade, Ms. VanVoorhis pointed out.

"The "examination" administered by a department may be typical final examination, an oral test, written papers or projects, or any other combination of work which will satisfy the examiners that the student has adequately achieved the values of the course."

"Minimum standards for awarding credits by examination shall be determined by the academic department giving the examination. Minimum standards for awarding credits on nationally-administered examinations shall be established by the appropriate academic department. The national examinations shall be reviewed every five years to determine whether the minimum standards remain appropriate."

In response to a question from Professor Odom, Ms. VanVoorhis said that the departments have always had authority over examinations.

"No department shall be required to give examinations for credit or to offer credits for nationally-recognized tests."

"Credits may be awarded for a particular course if the academic department reviewing the national examination determines that the material in the test is substantially similar to that of an existing course; if the material is judged to be of college level but not substantially similar to an existing course, general departmental credits are assigned."

"3. Procedures for handling examinations shall be established by the Office of the Registrar."

[Procedures for proficiency exams: Proficiency exams will be noted via a student group in PeopleSoft. This will not appear on the transcript. Proficiency exams other than for second languages must be entered as an exception in the degree audit system in order for the credit to be included in the degree audit. Waiver or exemption from a course must be entered in the degree audit system and will not display on the transcript.

Procedures for exams for credit: Special examinations for credit do not count toward the University residence requirement. The academic record will show the following:

-- Effective fall 1999, special examinations will be recorded in PeopleSoft as test credits. These test credits will be included in the cumulative credits (but not term credits), and will carry a grade of "T"--this grade will not be reflected in either the term or cumulative grade point average.

-- {For examinations that were taken} Prior to fall 1999, special examinations with grades other than a "T" grade, will be recorded on a student's transcript with a special examination notation. Letter grades from special examinations will not be included in the term or cumulative grade point average.

-- {For examinations that were taken} Prior to fall 1999, those examinations with no grades will be recorded in PeopleSoft as test credits. These credits will carry a grade of "T" that will not be included in the term or cumulative grade point average.]

If the policy passes as proposed, would it preclude graduate and professional programs from offering exams for proficiency, Professor Branton asked? It would not, Ms. VanVoorhis said; there is no corresponding policy for post-graduate students. It needs to be made clear that his policy applies only to undergraduates, Professor Sampson said.

The Committee approved the changes unanimously and decided it would report them to the Senate as an Interpretation of the policy.

3. Lapsing Incompletes

The next policy proposal Ms. VanVoorhis had to do with the grading policy provision requiring that an Incomplete on a transcript lapses to an F after a year unless it is changed to a grade. There is a dilemma that arises, she told the Committee.

(1) A student's academic record is considered frozen once a student graduates. Changes to the academic record of a graduate are only made as a result of extenuating circumstances. (2) PeopleSoft does not store a student's GPA; it calculates the GPA for each term and cumulatively by career (e.g., graduate, undergraduate) whenever a transcript is run. (3) It is conceivable that a student could graduate with a cumulative GPA of the required 2.0--but that when an I grade (or grades) lapses to an F, the student's cumulative GPA may fall below a 2.0, which then places him or her below the minimum GPA required for graduation. (4) The GPA reflected on a student's transcript will be different at the time of graduation and after the I grade lapses to an F. Students regularly request official transcripts upon graduation and these students are confused and angry when they request transcripts and the GPAs are different.

Ms. VanVoorhis recalled that she presented this briefly to the Committee last spring and outlined the options. She presented the options once again, along with the possible benefits and drawbacks.

Option 1: Require that students clear all Incompletes before a degree will be awarded

In this scenario, a student who applies for graduation with an I on the record would be informed that he or she needs to clear the I before receiving the degree. It will be up to the student to resolve the situation by completing, dropping, or allowing the I to become an F before graduation. The student would not be allowed to graduate until all I grades had been changed to a valid grade.

Option 2: Lapse Incompletes to Fs with no special coding

A student who has an I at the time of graduation would receive his or her degree but if the I is still outstanding after a year, it would lapse to an F. The student's cumulative GPA would change to reflect the F grade. The DEGREE GPA would not change, and any honors/awards (e.g., Dean's List) would not be adjusted.

Option 3: I with a special symbol for graduating students (i.e., I*)

A student who graduates will have all of the I grades changed to an I with a symbol (i.e., I*). These grades will remain an I* unless the student requests an exemption from the policy and wishes to complete the course. The I* will not be included in the cumulative GPA. A student's transcript will reflect that these courses remained incomplete.

Option 4: Allow I grades to remain on the transcript for graduating students

For students who are graduating, I grades would remain on the transcript and not lapse to an F after one year. The college must determine if the course grade is necessary to determine if a student will graduate. After a student has graduated, he or she must petition his or her college to complete the I and change it to a different letter grade. The degree GPA would be frozen upon graduation but the cumulative GPA would reflect the change in GPA if a student chooses to complete an I grade.

Ms. VanVoorhis emphasized that this policy change would apply only to UNDERGRADUATE students who are graduating or who have already graduated. And she cautioned that this policy change would not affect a large number of people; from fall, 1999, to spring, 2002, there were 159 people in the situation that needs to be addressed. Last term there were 9 people.

Option 1 includes students who have enough credits to graduate without changing the I to a grade, Professor Sampson asked? It does, Ms. VanVoorhis affirmed. Option 2

Professor Odom said she favored Option 1 as the cleanest approach. Professor Cardwell saw a problem with it, however: A student needs only two required courses to complete degree work but registers for four courses and does not finish two of them. If the student has COMPLETED degree requirements and the two extra courses were electives beyond what was required for a degree, the student should not be penalized for starting but not completing the extra courses. The question is what mechanisms exist, with what deadlines, for cleaning up a record.

Professor Curley said that a graduating senior who needs two course could register for four, figure out which two he or she is doing best in, and ignore the other two, thus sidestepping the drop/withdrawal policy.

Professor Ahern said he preferred Option 4. Both 2 and 3 are problematic, he said. This would only apply to Incompletes earned in the senior year, he pointed out; any I earned before that would have lapsed to an F before the student graduates. Would Option 4 mean Minnesota would be the only institution that allows an I to stay on a transcript, he asked? It would not be, Ms. VanVoorhis said; 60% of institutions have adopted Option 1 as their rule but the other 40% have a variety of rules, including leaving the I on the transcript.

Dr. Swan said he was sympathetic to Professor Cardwell's view that a student should be allowed to graduate. Both Professors Cardwell and Curley, however, imply that the student would receive an I in courses he or she did not complete. That is not so: Senate policy makes it clear that an I is to be granted only in extraordinary circumstances, not just because the student skipped the final exam.

Dr. Shaw said that requiring a student to finish courses might not be feasible.

Dr. Simmons said she also preferred Option 4, although it could be labor-intensive for advisors. Students would have to be informed about the consequences of failing to complete a course, including the fact that graduate schools may look at Incompletes. The student must make a considered decision not to complete a course.

Professor Branton said that given two students, one a junior and one a senior, and both enroll for courses that neither needs for graduation, the junior would be penalized and the senior would get a pass.

Professor Odom suggested that Option 1 would be more student-friendly if it provided an option for students to petition to withdraw from a course. Professor Ahern pointed out that any student can already petition on any policy. It is not clear from Option 1 that it is consistent with how

students are treated otherwise, Professor Odom responded; most bodies would allow the student to withdraw.

Professor Wangenstein also voice support for Option 1 if it would also be easier for a student to change to audit status or to take a Withdrawal for a course. He said he would prefer that people clean up their transcript before graduating. Graduate programs do raise questions about I's.

In the case of Option 4, Professor Curley said, there is a policy on giving an I and no guarantee a student will obtain one—but they could put pressure on faculty to give them an I in order that they can graduate. Would it be possible to craft a policy so that only graduating seniors could change their enrollment to audit status, in which case it would not matter if they finished the course or not. Professor Cardwell said he could support Option 1 IF students would be allowed to change their registration status to audit any time during their final semester.

Professor Sampson wondered if, with the 13-credit policy, there is any reason to assume there will be more I's of this type in the future. Ms. VanVoorhis thought not. Dr. Swan said that a graduating senior may enroll for fewer than 13 credits if he or she will graduate with the lower number of credits. The University is challenged to keep up its standards and also to improve graduation rates, Professor Sampson observed. Option 4 does those things without encumbering students with another process to change grades or enrollment status. He added that he is uncomfortable giving a student an I because it gives him or her more time to complete the course—or other courses.

Professor Curley asked Professor Odom if Option 1 with the proviso that students could change to an audit would be acceptable. Associate Dean Garner, however, expressed doubt that students would know about the option to change to audit status. Faculty would not know about it, students will miss it, and the proposal sounds too complex to work, she said. A student would have to petition for a change to audit status after the first two weeks of the semester, Dr. Swan added. Professor Wangenstein agreed that this would place a burden on the student; students could be told when they apply to graduate that they need to change a course registration if they will not finish it. Ms. Lazarus agreed with Dean Garner—she commented that this situation will occur with most faculty only once in their career and it will be too complicated.

Professor Sampson observed that more people have taken part in the debate over this issue than were affected by it in spring, 2002. If the policy is changed, might there be more Incompletes that would lapse? Ms. VanVoorhis said she thought few students realize they have to finish a course so doubted there would be an increase. But some students no doubt do assume they must finish; to create the audit option could lead to an increase in audits, he said.

Mr. Ferguson said he thought most students assume they must finish a course; Option 1 encourages them to do so. But if only 9 students did not finish courses, Option 4 is most reasonable. There needs to be some option for a student after graduation, which Option 1 does not allow.

Professor Cardwell said that with the change to semesters, most curricula got tight and gave students few electives. When a student files for graduation, he or she must identify the courses that satisfy degree requirements; students know what courses MUST be completed. He said he wanted a policy that would not catch students by surprise. They know an I in a required course will not work but do not necessarily know that about elective courses. He said he did not want to see the University

sending letters to students after graduation about not completing courses and that there needs to be something that will clean up the transcript but not require a lot of student action for courses that are not required for the degree.

Dr. Shaw agreed and asked if PeopleSoft could accommodate a change. Ms. VanVoorhis said they are cleaning up graduation processes and notifications to colleges and students; any change adopted by the Committee could be incorporated in that effort.

Professor Ahern at this point moved the Committee eliminate Options 2 and 3; the motion passed unanimously. With no further discussion, he then moved the Committee approve Option 4. The motion carried 7-4 with no abstentions. Professor Sampson said the change would be brought to the Senate for action.

4. Subcommittees and Charges

Professor Sampson announced that he had received no additional suggestions for the subcommittee on undergraduate education at a research university. Professors Branton and Cardwell agreed to serve as co-chairs of the subcommittee; Professor Wangenstein will also serve on it.

The subcommittee on civic learning will continue from last year, with Professors Harry Boyte and Martin Sampson as co-chairs and with Dr. Simmons and Ms. Haas as members.

The subcommittee on technology-enhanced learning will have Professors Odom and Kulacki as co-chairs; Professor Sampson said he would speak with others about serving.

5. Teaching Awards

Professor Sampson recalled that last spring the Committee heard from a doctor at Hennepin County Medical Center who thought that people who are not employed by the University but who make substantial contributions to graduate or professional education should be eligible for the teaching award. Professor Sampson said he thought the Committee felt empathy for the individual but the item went no further. At the same time, he said, he sensed it was the view of the Committee that the awards should not be opened to individuals who are not regular faculty. He noted that the Academic Health Center had not gone to bat for the proposal; in fact, Senior Vice President Cerra opposed extending eligibility for the award outside of faculty funded by the University.

Professor Ahern agreed that eligibility should not be extended. He noted that there is a significant corps of non-tenure-track faculty who teach for many years who are not eligible for the award. To open one category of individuals for eligibility but not others would not be wise. He urged there be no change in the policy.

Professor Wangenstein, from the Medical School, noted that he was not on the Committee when the request was made but said he had read the minutes. He said he had also spoken with the individual who made the request. There are people who make huge contributions to medical education, he agreed, but it is their choice not to be at the University and said he did not believe they should receive special treatment. He said he did not believe extending eligibility for the award would be a good idea.

Ms. Lazarus inquired why non-tenure-track faculty were not eligible for the award. She said it is her sense that over time a larger percentage of the faculty is non-tenure-track, but want to be tenure-track. She said they could be rewarded by being eligible for the award without costing the University a lot.

Professor Sampson suggested that perhaps another category of award could be set up for people who do not work at the University.

Professor Sampson now turned to Dr. Bacig for a discussion of the policies and procedures governing the teaching awards. Two changes were noted and approved by the Committee:

-- Current practice is that the department of each recipient (of either the Morse-Alumni or graduate/professional teaching award) receives funding for five years for the development of teaching materials and training. The Committee agreed that the policy language should be changed simply to note that the recipient would receive non-recurring funding, the amount and duration to be recommended by this Committee. Dr. Swan assured the Committee there would no unilateral action in changing the amount or duration of the support. It was agreed that perhaps the Committee should adopt a statement endorsing the current practice of providing the support for five years.

-- Winners of the award are members of the Academy of Distinguished Teachers (without any term, as the current version of the policy specifies).

Mr. Ferguson asked about application of the procedures. He had served on the nominating committee and observed that even though the procedures stipulate that excellence in one area can compensate for less accomplishment in the other four areas, the nominating committee nonetheless tended to select people whose performance was outstanding in all categories. Professor Odom, who had also served on the nominating committee, agreed that the committee, faced with an intimidating pile of applicants who are very good, gravitates to selecting those who are outstanding in all areas.

Professor Sampson said this tendency sounded acceptable to him unless it would work to the disadvantage of certain parts of the University. In some areas it might be easier to do well in all five areas while in others it might only be possible to do extremely well in three of the five areas. Professor Ahern agreed that there is a tendency to look at people who do well in all five categories but urged that there be no change in the procedures so the nominating committee has the discretion to recognize someone who is SO exceptional in one or a few areas that he or she could outshine other candidates who did well in all five categories. Professor Odom agreed. Dr. Bacig said the list of criteria is not exhaustive or exclusive; the magnitude of contributions in one area may compensate for less activity in other areas.

Professor Cardwell noted that in some professional societies, when offering a national fellowship, the NOMINATOR is responsible for identifying the weighting that is to be attached to each of the categories. It might be that a candidate is to be evaluated 100% on one criterion and zero on the others. That would be a difference in practice if applied here, Professor Curley said, and might allow individuals to come out higher than they would otherwise. Mr. Ferguson said he thought candidates should be able to contribute in a number of areas.

Professor Sampson inquired if there is anything this Committee can do to enhance the working of the process. Professor Curley, who had served one year on the nominating committee, suggested it would help to have consistency in the information provided. Some individuals provide much more information with respect to some criteria; it would be helpful to have a more consistent format.

Professor Sampson adjourned the meeting at 3:00.

-- Gary Engstrand

University of Minnesota