

Minutes*

**Senate Committee on Faculty Affairs
Tuesday, December 9, 2008
3:00 – 4:00
238A Morrill Hall**

Present: Kathryn Hanna (chair), Ben Bornsztein, Marilyn Bruin, Arlene Carney, Dann Chapman, Vladimir Cherkassky, Tom Clayton, Randy Croce, Theodor Litman, Joe Ritter, George Sheets, Geoffrey Sirc, Roderick Squires, Elizabeth Stallman

Absent: Carol Carrier, Jayne Fulkerson, Holly Littlefield, Luis Ramos-Garcia, James Wojtaszek, Jessica Reinitz

Guests: Professor John Howe & Hal Miller (University of Minnesota Retirees Association)

[In these minutes: (1) student rating of teaching in small classes; (2) report from the retirees' association]

1. Student Rating of Teaching in Small Classes

Professor Hanna convened the meeting at 3:00, noted that the health-care savings plan issue would be coming up at the next meeting, and turned to the issue of student rating of teaching in small classes. The Senate Committee on Educational Policy has voted to recommend to the Faculty Senate removing the existing ban on rating for classes with fewer than five students because faculty who teach those classes want the ratings and comments and because the concern about anonymity is as true in classes with more students, so should not be a factor that bars evaluation of small classes.

Vice Provost Carney noted that there will be statistical issues—there will be no means and standard deviations reported for small classes. The Provost has asked her to lead a group to help implement the new student evaluation policy and forms and to get information to faculty and instructors to be sure they are informed about the new Senate policy. Because the student-rating information is used in promotion and tenure and merit decisions, they want clarity about the policy.

Dr. Carney also reported that they are working on developing an electronic evaluation system that does not compromise return rates. Professor Sheets urged that the University move toward an electronic system and said there should not be two systems. In his department, the faculty decided not to use the electronic system because the response rates were not as good, but many believe it is too time-consuming to ask student to fill out the forms in class. Dr. Carney promised that her ad hoc committee will look at the issue and will make recommendations on the use of the student-rating data.

There are ways to deal with the confidentiality issue, Professor Ritter said. In his unit, for example, the written comments are on separate forms and are not sent to the Office of Measurement Services—they are typed up by question and given to the instructors. The ability to do that depends on the size of the class, Professor Hanna pointed out.

* 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.

Ms. Stallman spoke in favor of the proposal to collect student evaluations from small classes. She represents the graduate-student viewpoint and said that she and other graduate students with whom she has spoken actually want professors to receive their evaluations, even if the writers might be identifiable. These students think this feedback is valuable and follows from the free flow of ideas that characterize such small classes.

Professor Hanna asked if the Committee wished to make a recommendation. Professor Ritter asked if using the evaluation forms in small classes would be fair to students. They should be informed that it will be easy to identify individual students and should be given the option not to participate. Students need not fill out the forms now, Professor Hanna noted.

The Committee voted unanimously in favor of the change recommended by the Senate Committee on Educational Policy.

2. Report from the Retirees Association

Professor Hanna now welcomed Professors Howe and Miller from the University of Minnesota Retirees Association (UMRA).

Professor Miller said they joined the meeting to report on two (UMRA) activities since the Committee approved a resolution last November supporting its work: a small grants program and a retirees' center.

Professor Howe reported that UMRA serves the University in a number of ways; it has about 600 members, mostly faculty, and is Twin-Cities-specific. The UMRA Board talks about ways to connect retirees with the University and ways they can serve it even though they are retired. A year ago a number in UMRA talked about a small grants program for retirees who wished to continue their professional work. A group was appointed to explore the possibility and looked at other research universities for a model; there was none, so they are inventing as they go along. The Board approved the idea (of small grants for retired faculty, P&A staff, and civil service staff) and voted to commit \$10,000 in seed money to show its support. They then talked to some of the University's senior officers and received warm support, so there is now in place a trial program, funded on soft money, that will provide up to 10 grants per year of up to \$3500. The deans have also been supportive and some contributed funds. They hope the trial will demonstrate its value and the need for grants for retirees. They are partnering with the Graduate School to administer the program and have the funding for the first year.

They have issued a call for proposals but it is difficult to get addresses for retirees; Human Resources only allows a contact once. They want to offer this opportunity to retired colleagues and it should not be as difficult as it is. They have a committee to evaluate applications, which were due December 15, (42 proposals were submitted) and it will make recommendations to the Dean of the Graduate School for awarding grants beginning July 1. The committee has set parameters: if the work is not a continuation of the individual's career, they want to be open but not foolish, and will deal with proposals as they come in.

Professor Howe said he hoped the Committee would keep the program in mind and offer support as appropriate.

Professor Hanna said she thought this is a good idea and asked if UMRA has approached foundations or other outside sources. They talked with the head of the University of Minnesota Foundation, Professor Howe said, who was interested and who indicated that if the program were successful that they might be able to identify donors willing to support it. The Mellon Foundation, for example, has a program to support retired faculty that they could explore, but must first prove the program here is a going enterprise.

Professor Hanna noted that one has his or her University email for life; presumably someone is able to establish a retiree email list. It might take work to set it up but it would not be hard to maintain it. Professor Howe said that college offices and departments differ in the extent to which they establish and maintain retiree lists, but they will continue to try to find ways to contact people who wish to retain their University affiliation.

The other item they have been discussing is a University-supported retiree center, Professor Miller said, and provided the Committee with a resolution last November asking that the University consider establishing a center. UMRA, he said, is only one of several organizations around the University that serve the needs of retirees, so others could use the center as well. They brought forward a report about a center in April, 2008, which is in the hands of Vice Provost Arlene Carney. They learned last November that creation of a task force to consider a center was on hold in light of the economic situation. UMRA would like to see the discussions go forward and then make a decision later if there should be action on any proposal. They would like to see the task force constituted and the administration to appoint members so that a center could be considered when times allow it. He said hoped the Committee would agree.

Professor Howe reported that they have examined many research-university websites and learned that many of them have a retirees' center. Why have one? Convenience; it can bring together programs for retirees; it can offer seminars for retirees and on retiring; it helps retirees keep their connection to the institution (which is good for the University and the retirees, who can participate in University programs). There are many reasons to consider a center, dozens of institutions have one, and there is much to be learned from other schools with experience to decide if it makes sense for Minnesota to follow suit.

Inasmuch as the Committee sponsored the initial resolution, can't it also appoint and charge a task force, Professor Sirc asked? They would like it to be a collaborative effort with the administration, Professor Miller said, but the initiative could come from this Committee. They have support from the other two major organizations of retirees (Minnesota Retirees Volunteer Center and the Osher Lifelong Learning Institute), he reported, and in terms of the broader question, they would favor closer collaboration among the groups; a center would help promote that and pull the groups together. One of the other groups receives a small grant to operate an office and programs and has a \$2 million endowment; all three organizations are located in the McNamara Alumni Center. Professor Hanna suggested it might be strategic to play off of what the groups have. There are a lot of retiree centers, Professor Howe commented, with varying administrative commitments and programs; there is no single model. They could learn a lot from studying what has been done elsewhere in order to make reasonable and responsible recommendations for the Twin Cities campus.

They have carried the ball on the center thus far, Professor Miller told the Committee, but it is now up to this Committee and the administration to act, and said UMRA would appreciate advice on what to do next. Professor Sirc said he would like this Committee to follow up and commented that it seems

they are receiving the same response from the administration as they did to the proposal for a faculty ombuds person: budget considerations seem to wipe out all innovation. He moved the appointment of a task force to develop recommendations that could be implemented later. Professor Howe said he would like to see administrative participation in such a task force. Professor Hanna said she would like to know which administrators provide support and retiree offices. Professor Sirc said the Committee has articulated an interest and can move forward without the administration and that it does not, now, need funding.

Professor Hanna asked if there were volunteers to serve on a task force; Professor Squires said he would do so. Professor Hanna said she would like to see the discussion begin and that other groups would be part of the process. Professor Howe said that with the approval of the Committee, there are several individuals willing to advance the agenda and pull a group together. If this Committee believes such an effort would be worthy and should go forward even in hard times because it costs nothing to do so, that would be helpful. Professor Hanna said she would help organize a group.

Professor Hanna thanked Professors Howe and Miller for joining the meeting, and adjourned it at 4:05.

-- Gary Engstrand

University of Minnesota