

---

# The University Senate

FACULTY • STUDENT • P&A • CIVIL SERVICE

---

UNIVERSITY OF MINNESOTA

## Senate Committee on Educational Policy (SCEP)

April 16, 2025

### Minutes of the Meeting

These minutes reflect discussion and debate at a meeting of a committee of the University of Minnesota Senate; none of the comments, conclusions or actions reported in these minutes reflect the views of, nor are they binding on, the senate, the administration or the Board of Regents. The University Senate Office utilized notes taken during the meeting, video recording and transcript of the meeting, and AI to assist in summarizing substantive parts of the meeting transcript to compose these minutes. Minutes are reviewed by the committee before posting.

**[In these minutes:** Reaccreditation Update; AI Syllabus Language and Policy; President's Task Force on AI; Alternative Presidential Task Force; Alternative Credentials Task Force]

**PRESENT:** Katherine Scheil (chair), Erin Baldinger, Shawn Curley, Erin Fider, Jennifer Gunn, Scott Lanyon, John LaVelle, Emily Pelton, Alex Risdall, Claire Segijn, Nadezhda Sotirova

**REGRETS:** Jessica Larson, Aashraya Seth, Raj Singh, Will Walstrom, Seth Weir

**ABSENT:** Nina Arleth, Betsy Murray

**OTHERS ATTENDING:** Erin Slattengren, assistant to the provost and accreditation liaison officer, Office of the Executive Vice President and Provost; and Katie Russell,

director, undergraduate policy and curriculum administration, Office of Undergraduate Education; Laura Scroggs, Jessica Kuecker Grotjohn, Dan Emery and, Emily Ronning, members, AI Syllabus Language Working Group; Caroline Hilke, director, Center for Education Innovation (CEI); Ryan Torma, executive director of professional development and lifelong learning, College of Continuing and Professional Studies; Anne Barnes, assistant to the provost, Office of the Executive Vice President and Provost; Toni Abts, director, Graduate Education Policy Office

## **1. Re-accreditation Update**

Katherine Scheil, chair, called the meeting to order and introduced Erin Slattengren, assistant to the provost and accreditation liaison officer, Office of the Executive Vice President and Provost; and Katie Russell, director, undergraduate policy and curriculum administration, Office of Undergraduate Education, who were present to [update the committee on the Higher Learning Commission \(HLC\) visit and re-accreditation](#) of the Twin Cities and Rochester campuses.

### **Overview**

- The University of Minnesota Twin Cities and Rochester campuses are undergoing institutional re-accreditation in Fall 2025.
- Accreditation is led by the Higher Learning Commission (HLC) and focuses on institution-wide quality, as opposed to specialized accreditations for individual programs (of which the university has over 120).
- HLC accreditation affirms quality across all degrees, locations, and delivery modes (e.g., in-person, online).

### **Review Cycle and Process**

- The University is in a 10-year Open Pathway cycle.
  - Last comprehensive review: 2015
  - Annual updates are submitted.
  - Year 4: interim report submitted.
  - Year 10 (2025): full report, site visit, and federal compliance review

## Key Components of the 2025 Review

- **Assurance Argument**
  - Due September 1, 2025, ahead of the site visit.
  - ~35,000 words, supported by an extensive evidence file (~500+ items: policies, assessments, reports, meeting minutes).
  - The goal is to tell a compelling narrative about how the University fulfills HLC's accreditation criteria and mission.
- **Federal Compliance Review:** Covers eight required areas to maintain eligibility for federal financial aid.
- **Student Opinion Survey**
  - Sent to all degree-seeking students on April 7; closed April 16.
  - Not used for rankings—meant to capture the student voice for the review team.
- **Peer Review Site Visit**
  - Scheduled for September 29–30, 2025.
  - 5-7 peer reviewers (trained professionals from other institutions).
  - Will include interviews with faculty, leadership, students, and open forums.
  - One reviewer will visit the Rochester campus, which will also submit a separate report.

## Preparation and Engagement

- Planning began in late 2023 with multiple committees:
  - Leadership Advisory Committee (includes faculty and governance reps)
  - Administrative Steering Committee (drafting the assurance argument and preparing for the visit)
- Ongoing outreach includes:
  - Presentations to various University groups
  - A dedicated accreditation website with updates, resources, and schedules (to be published closer to the visit)

## Context & Goals:

- The Higher Learning Commission (HLC) is increasing scrutiny on distance education post-pandemic.
- Institutions must show that online courses (defined as 75%+ content delivered online) include “regular and substantive interaction.”

### **Key Requirements:**

- Courses must meet at least two criteria from the following:
  - Direct instruction
  - Feedback on coursework
  - Responding to questions
  - Facilitating group discussions
  - Other pedagogically substantive interactions

### **CourseDog System Update:**

- New options allow faculty to specify all modalities in which a course is offered.
- If a course is marked as “primarily online,” “online,” or “remote,” users must:
  - Confirm consultation with an academic technologist
  - Indicate two methods of regular/substantive interaction used

### **Support & Resources:**

- Academic technologists across campuses (e.g., LATIS, CHD, ATSS) support the initiative.
- Online Course Standards developed for faculty to consult when designing courses.

The speakers then solicited questions and feedback from the committee. Shawn Curley asked how to code courses that are primarily asynchronous but include regular synchronous sessions. Russell responded that if a course includes regular, scheduled synchronous meetings, it should be coded as synchronous, even if it includes asynchronous elements. The goal is to ensure students understand they are signing up for synchronous components when registering.

John LaVelle expressed concern about the political implications of teaching sensitive topics (e.g., diversity, equity, inclusion) via online courses to students in states with differing ideologies and regulations, asking if the University could face legal issues. Russell agreed this is something to be mindful of. She noted that the University is accredited to teach in most states except California, which has not signed the relevant agreement. She acknowledged that ideological conflict hasn't been addressed yet but is worth keeping in mind.

Emily Pelton asked how the CourseDog system applies to courses offered in multiple formats (online and in-person). Russell explained that the system will apply moving forward, not retroactively. Updates to existing courses may be made gradually over the next few years.

## **2. AI Syllabus Language and Policy**

Next, Scheil turned the floor over to Laura Scroggs and Emily Ronning, members of the AI Syllabus Language Work Group, who were present to talk about syllabus language regarding generative AI. This was in follow up to the [discussion at a previous meeting](#).

Ronning explained that the tool is meant to:

- Be used by academic technologists who support faculty in designing online and hybrid courses.
- Help faculty define and articulate the role of AI in their courses.
- Promote consistency for students across courses, so students don't encounter drastically different or unclear expectations regarding AI.
- Be useful in any modality (not just online), though it originated from discussions about online teaching support.

Scroggs introduced a newly added recommended statement that addresses the

importance of original student thought in assignments and course activities. This statement was added in response to a suggestion from the previous meeting, which emphasized the need to address academic expectations in the age of generative AI. They shared a [recommended statement](#) and a [guidelines document](#).

Members raised the following points in discussion:

Claire Segijn noted that it may be important to also consider statements for instructors who may not want to adopt AI. This may be important to increase awareness that a ban is challenging due to:

- Limitations of AI detection tools, which can yield false positives or false negatives.
- AI is often embedded in tools (e.g., Google, Grammarly, or citation generators), and users might be unaware they're interacting with AI.

Scroggs said that the first three statements in the document are designed to be modular and adaptable, allowing instructors to choose whether and how AI use is permitted. The third statement explicitly addresses scholastic dishonesty and notes the lack of reliable AI detection tools. It states the University does not license or recommend such tools due to their current limitations. She clarified that a separate group is working on AI and academic integrity, focusing on the role of AI detection software. More guidance is forthcoming from that group. The team tried to frame the guidelines around generative AI tools, to distinguish these from AI embedded in general software. However, they acknowledged a need to better address non-obvious AI integrations and might add more explicit language about this.

Ronning emphasized that beyond developing the AI syllabus statements, the team is now discussing how to provide training and education for faculty and staff on how to use them effectively. The aim is not just distribution, but to build community knowledge and capacity around the appropriate integration and communication of AI expectations in

teaching. She said that suggestions like Segijn's about clarifying use cases for different audiences will help inform future training materials and use cases.

Shawn Curley asked whether there's a distinction in the guidance between public AI tools like ChatGPT and University-supported tools such as Microsoft Copilot. Scroggs said yes, the distinction is meaningful, particularly regarding data privacy and security. For example, Copilot does not retain user data or student inputs, while third-party tools may capture or store data in ways that raise FERPA or academic integrity concerns. The team prefers that faculty encourage tools that protect student data, but current statements do not formally require that distinction—guidance could be added.

Scheil thanked the presenters and said that a vote on replacing current guidance with this new guidance would go out to the committee via email.<sup>1</sup>

### **3. Presidential Task Force on AI Update**

Scheil transitioned to the next agenda item, an update from the Presidential Task Force on AI and Education, which she co-chairs alongside Caroline Hilk, director, Center for Educational Innovation (CEI). Hilk presented the update, including the following highlights:

#### **Purpose and Timeline:**

- The task force was charged in January 2025 and must deliver preliminary recommendations by early May.
- These will focus on:
  - Benchmarking against peer institutions
  - Making investment recommendations
  - Engaging stakeholders on the impact of AI on University practices.

#### **Structure:**

---

<sup>1</sup> The committee voted in favor of replacing the current guidance.

- The task force is divided into three working groups: Research, Education (co-chaired by Scheil and Hilk); and Administrative Operations.

### **Education Working Group Focus:**

- Exploring how AI can/should be used in:
  - Assignments, assessments, feedback
  - Academic integrity
  - Student advising and support
  - Faculty and student AI literacy
  - Workforce development
- The goal is to craft practical, inclusive recommendations that apply across all campuses and educational units.

### **Benchmarking:**

- The group benchmarked AI practices against Big Ten institutions to stay aligned with peer universities.

### **Stakeholder Engagement:**

- Actively gathering feedback from faculty, staff, and students, as well as through national surveys and the SERU undergraduate survey on AI use
- Unfortunately, the Graduate SERU survey was delayed, so they will rely on other data sources for graduate student perspectives.

Scheil and Hilk invited SCEP members to respond to three prompt areas (typed into chat):

- Opportunities you see for using AI in education
- Challenges or risks
- Other considerations you'd like the task force to address

Pelton remarked upon the rapid evolution of AI technology, noting that it risks outpacing the University's current approval and implementation processes. She proposed that a

more nimble approval process for educational tools is needed.

Jennifer Gunn voiced concerns about AI reproducing bias, racism, and reinforcing flawed data, pointing to the need for ongoing critical evaluation of AI's impact and ethical considerations, beyond just adopting tools for presumed benefits.

Segijn opined that faculty are not adequately incentivized to rethink assignments or learning objectives in light of AI. This is especially difficult for tenure-track faculty balancing research with teaching responsibilities. She suggested the University consider incentive structures to encourage pedagogical redesign around AI.

Segijn also said that AI literacy must extend beyond technical skills to include ethical understanding; awareness of who is behind AI tools; and monetization and commercial motivations.

Peloton pointed out that faculty may not know where to start or who to ask about AI tools, emphasizing the need for clear communication of available resources; outreach (e.g., start-of-semester announcements); and avoiding website navigation as the only path to support.

Segijn said that faculty would benefit from seeing real examples of how others have integrated AI effectively. She warned against adopting AI just because it's trendy—focus should be on pedagogically sound uses, and suggested a platform for sharing best practices.

Erin Baldinger noted that the University already has valuable resources like the Learning Technologies program; an AI research group within the Curriculum & Instruction department; and the AI Makerspace.

Hilk thanked members for their input and emphasized that this was the beginning of an ongoing conversation with SCEP, and that the committee plans to return for future discussions as implementation moves forward.

#### **4. Alternative Credentials Task Force**

Scheil welcomed Ryan Torma, executive director of professional development and lifelong learning, College of Continuing and Professional Studies and Anne Barnes, assistant to the provost, Office of the Executive Vice President and Provost, who were present to provide an update on the Alternative Credentials Task Force. They shared [slides](#) and a [draft report](#).

#### **Background and Rationale**

- The task force was charged in Fall 2023 by the provost to review and recommend governance strategies for alternative credentials at the University of Minnesota. Focus: Noncredit offerings resulting in University credentials (e.g., certificates of completion, CEUs, digital badges).
- Alternative credentials are widely issued across the University through various programs (e.g., continuing education, professional development, and even credit-bearing programs). There's no centralized tracking system—estimations suggest thousands of learners served and hundreds of credentials issued annually.
- Builds upon previous work (2017-2021) that provided guidelines, but no formal governance or policy.
- Increased interest and scrutiny from external bodies like the Higher Learning Commission and Minnesota State Office of Higher Education indicate a need to ensure consistent quality, recognition, and policy compliance.

#### **Key Recommendations**

- Establish Formal Governance Structure
  - Create a systemwide Alternative Credential Governance Committee.

- Move from guidance to enforceable governance, with attention to scalability, flexibility, and responsiveness.
- Appoint Dedicated Staff
  - Create a full-time role within the provost's office to support governance efforts.
  - Responsibilities: coordination, training, policy alignment, and support for faculty and staff.
- Provide Development Resources
  - Develop centralized resources to guide the creation of high-quality alternative credentials aligned with governance frameworks.
  - Leverage existing Community of Practice groups.
- Monitor Compliance and Policy Environment
  - Stay current with state and accreditor requirements.
  - Adapt frameworks in response to evolving standards and expectations.
- Support Credit for Prior Learning (CPL)
  - Advocate for a systemwide CPL policy to allow credentialed learners to apply alternative learning toward degree programs.
  - Acknowledge that further work will be needed to align alternative credentialing with existing university policies.

### Discussion Highlights

- Gunn asked whether the task force addressed the broader purpose or strategy behind alternative credentials. Torma said the group began definitional and mapping work, including taxonomy development (e.g., differentiating badges vs. certificates), but more structured definitional work is needed.
- **Baldinger** raised concerns about how academic advisers integrate alternative credentials with traditional advising structures. Torma acknowledged this and noted the absence of advisers in the task force but emphasized the need for integration as the work progresses.

### Next Steps

- Collect feedback via a form distributed to University stakeholders.

- Conclude listening sessions by the end of May 2025.
- Final report to be submitted to the provost in early June 2025.

Scheil thanked Torma for the presentation and he departed.

## **5. Policy Exceptions Report**

Scheil turned the floor over to Toni Abts, director, Graduate Education Policy Office, who presented an overview of graduate education policy exceptions.

### **Key Points from the Presentation:**

- Most Common Exception Areas:
  - Credit Requirements for Master's and Doctoral Degrees: Exceptions are only granted when a program exceeds the maximum credit limit (not the minimum). This affects around 10% of programs, mostly due to accreditation needs—especially for master's Plan C (coursework-only) programs.
  - Appointments as Director of Graduate Studies (DGS): Current policy requires a tenure-track faculty member, but many professional programs lack such positions or prefer industry experts. A revised policy is in development that will distinguish between graduate research and professional education.
  - Application of Credits (Student-Level): Generally, exceptions aren't granted here, except for Integrated Degree Programs (IDPs), which may now allow limited double-counting (up to 9 credits) between undergraduate and graduate degrees to improve feasibility without compromising rigor. So far, nine programs have been approved.
  - Performance Standards & Progress (Time to Degree): Exceptions usually involve time-to-degree extensions. The first extension (up to 24 months) is handled at the college level. A second extension goes to the Graduate School and requires a detailed completion plan. Long-term inactivity or

unclear plans can jeopardize approval. Future policy reviews will reassess whether current time limits are still appropriate.

- Strategic Approach Moving Forward:
  - The Graduate School prefers embedding flexibility into policy rather than routinely granting exceptions.
  - Clear guidelines are being developed to indicate when exceptions will not be granted, minimizing unnecessary requests and administrative burdens.
- Discussion Highlights:
  - Gunn asked how funding duration for PhD students affects extensions. Abts clarified that funding logistics are assumed to be vetted by advisers and colleges before reaching The Graduate School. The focus is on whether the student has a concrete plan and valid reasons for delays.
  - Scott Lanyon emphasized the importance of preventing indefinite degree timelines and explained why second-stage exception reviews are more stringent.

Scheil thanked Abts and adjourned the meeting.

Amber Bathke

University Senate Office