

Minutes*

**Senate Consultative Committee
Thursday, April 6, 2000
2:30 – 3:30
Room 238 Morrill Hall**

- Present: David Hamilton (chair pro tem), Sabeen Altaf, Susan Brorson, Mary Dempsey, Meggan Ellingboe, Roberta Humphreys, Mary Jo Kane, Leonard Kuhi, Judith Martin, Joseph Massey, Paula Rabinowitz, Jason Reed, Chaz Rice, Aaron Street
- Regrets: Linda Brady, Les Drewes, Fred Morrison, V. Rama Murthy, Jeff Ratliff-Crain
- Absent: Stephen Gudeman, Jed Ipsen, Kevin Poppel, Reid LeBeau, Tiffany Stedman, Mark Uszenski
- Guests: Regents' Professor Tom Clayton, Ms. Betty Hackett (member of the Special Senate Committee)
- Others: Liz Bogut (Minnesota DAILY), Maureen Smith (Institutional Relations)

[In these minutes: Report of the Special Senate Committee on Student Academic Integrity]

1. Report of the Special Senate Committee on Student Academic Integrity

Professor Hamilton convened the meeting at 2:40 and welcomed Regents' Professor Tom Clayton to present the report of the Special Senate Committee on Student Academic Integrity. [The full text of the report may be viewed on the web at <http://www1.umn.edu/usenate/reports/saicrept.html>]

Professor Clayton began by noting that two of the other committee members (Professors Kane and Martin) were also present at this meeting and could also respond to questions. The Special Committee finished its work about two weeks ago, he reported, and has since been drafting and editing its final report, which is submitted today. The Consultative Committee charged the Special Committee to look into academic integrity and violations of it. The Special Committee has been considering the issues since December; it has met 14 times, interviewed a number of people and read a great deal of material, and now comes with recommendations that it hopes will help the University. He noted that there will be some expense and the recommendations will require some administration.

The central recommendation of the report is the establishment of an Office of Academic Integrity (hereinafter OAI) with an academic integrity officer as chief administrator responsible for a

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number of functions that are identified in the report. Among other things, the academic integrity officer would be responsible for disseminating information, conducting investigations when allegations of cheating are made (if the faculty member wishes), dealing with infractions, and informing students as well as protecting their rights.

The Special Committee looked first at where it wanted to go, which is a University where no one cheats (recognizing that the goal could never be fully achieved). Then the question was how to get there. The report suggests ways to do so. Over the last couple of years there has been much published about cheating on college campuses, and there is no doubt that cheating does occur. It is, however, hard to say how much occurs on any given campus. Presumably with more machinery to deal with it there will be more reported incidents. The Special Committee was informed that Minnesota in a recent year had 32 reported incidents of cheating (across colleges); one western public research university in the same year had 4000 reported incidents. It seems unlikely that Minnesota has such a comparatively low rate.

One goal is for people to be able to say, with pride and conviction, that academic integrity is central to the University of Minnesota.

The Special Committee considered recommending an honor code or an honor system. It learned through its investigations that the terms have very loose definitions and often have only honorific value. They did not, as a consequence, worry too much whether or not they were recommending anything specifically called an honor code. Some codes are nothing more than a simple statement signed by students affirming that they will not cheat. That is a beginning, and something the Special Committee has recommended: the intent is to get students on record as well as bring to mind the fact that academic integrity is important at the University. If that is an honor code, then the Special Committee is recommending one.

Honor systems are characterized by having all student work and examinations unsupervised. It is not realistic to believe that will work at the University now, Professor Clayton said. It may work in units such as Pharmacy, Law, and Natural Resources (all of which have honor systems and about which the Special Committee informed itself). Those are small homogeneous units where students reinforce one another's behavior. Honor systems also are student-administered, which also seemed unrealistic for a campus the size of the Twin Cities (perhaps it would work at Crookston or Morris).

One could hope that asking students to sign a statement upon matriculation would have the effect of instantly eliminating all cheating, so there would be no need for an office or committee; but it seems likely there will nonetheless be a need for them.

Professor Clayton then reviewed parts of the report with the Committee. A number of the recommendations are in the way of advice, he said, and the Special Committee assumes that the office and relationships outlined will evolve with experience.

Part of the impetus for their report is the growing menace of the Web to academic integrity. There are a lot of materials out there for students to use illegitimately. The Web cannot be put out

of business nor can the University keep up with the multitude of ways to use it to cheat, but the Special Committee has recommended ways to deal with cheating.

The fundamental aim of the report, Professor Clayton said, is to protect the work of students who do not cheat so that they receive the full benefit of that work. This will, in turn, protect the University itself as well as the degrees it awards.

Professor Kuhi inquired about one of the proposed declarations that students would be asked to sign ("The work on this paper or project is entirely my own except as documented otherwise, and I have given no undocumented assistance on the assignment to others"). Would this preclude students from working together? Professor Clayton said it would not; it is understood and expected that students study together and work together on projects. There is a judgment involved, and the Special Committee is not suggesting a police state. There is a line to be drawn between students studying and learning together, for example, and one doing part or all of another student's work. One might say that there is a line to be drawn between occasional consultation and illicit collaboration. This is a matter of degree and of common sense. This will need clarification, Professor Hamilton observed, because in some disciplines students are required to work together. It can be modified, Professor Clayton agreed, with a comment acknowledging the norms of different disciplines.

An implied understanding that existed throughout the process, Professor Martin commented, is that the PRIMARY concern is with undergraduates. There is a much greater direct connection between graduate students and their advisors.

Professor Rabinowitz objected to part of another of the statements students would be asked to sign ("I have not cheated while taking this examination and I will report anyone I saw cheating"). She said she would not sign such a statement and did not want students put in the position of having to tattle or rat on other students. Professor Martin reported that the impetus for this phrase came from the undergraduate student on the Special Committee; there was a strong sense that students feel cheaters place other students at a disadvantage but they do not feel they can report any cheating they observe. They have the impression that there is a lot of cheating but they have no way to deal with it. Professor Rabinowitz said this might be acceptable if there were a mechanism to deal with the allegations. She added, however, that there are many reasons people do not report cheating, and to require this statement is an invasion of privacy before the appropriate mechanism is put in place.

Professor Kane responded that the report is about creating a culture of academic integrity, not surveillance. She said she could understand people using terms like "tattling" and "ratting" but part of creating a culture of integrity is instilling in students a sense of duty and sense of obligation, a sense that they are all in this together. What should they do if they know a student in a class cheated, she asked? Are they under no obligation to do anything if they take academic integrity seriously?

Mr. Street said he agreed with Professor Rabinowitz. It is inappropriate to require students to sign the statement when they are not willing to report cheating; that will make liars of them when they sign.

What effect will there be from signing any declaration, Ms. Ellingboe asked? Some students will continue to cheat anyway. Professor Clayton said that some will, some will not. Much cheating is opportunistic, and this statement will remind students about integrity. He agreed that liars will sign the statement and cheat anyway, but signing the statement puts them on record on the issue. With respect to the point raised by Professor Rabinowitz, Professor Clayton recalled that the Special Committee had discussed the issue but that it comes down to this: what is the moral responsibility of the person who observes cheating? It is to the rest of the people in the course who are victimized by the cheater.

What happens if the student refuses to sign the statement, asked Mr. Rice? Nothing, Professor Clayton responded; students cannot be forced to sign it. Presumably an instructor could refuse to give an exam to anyone who refused to sign, but the report does not say that. The Special Committee expects that most students would see this as a benefit.

Professor Massey said he would not sign such a statement and would prefer that the two clauses be separated.

Professor Hamilton said he thought a number of cogent arguments had been made and that he was not sure the second part of the statement had any meaning nor would it change behavior. The University will need to be careful about requiring it be signed; the goal of creating an environment of integrity is more important.

Professor Kane emphasized that the Special Committee heard OVER and OVER that creating a culture of academic integrity happens not just with messages but with messages that have teeth and practice. Faculty and students must be involved. Students must get the message in their first contact with the University that academic integrity is taken seriously. The idea is not to create a Nazi police state but to create a culture of integrity.

Professor Rabinowitz said she did not disagree but that a culture will not be achieved by "signing little statements."

If a student refuses to sign and the instructor refuses to grade an exam, will the OAI institute a protocol for dealing with the situation, Ms. Ellingboe asked? Professor Clayton said the Special Committee did not consider such degrees of specificity in its report; it did not deal with the details of how the OAI office would function.

Could students submit claims about cheating to the OAI, Professor Hamilton asked? They could, Professor Clayton affirmed.

Discussion turned to the functions of the OAI. Professor Kane reported that the Special Committee heard repeatedly that faculty do not want to spend the time required to pursue cheating when they suspect it has occurred so they simply ignore it. It was also said repeatedly, however, that faculty would make charges if they did not have to do all the work but could instead turn the investigative function over to an office. One purpose of the office, Professor Clayton added, is to relieve the instructor of the inordinate burden of work in pursuing a claim of cheating; the office should make things better for everyone, instructors and students. The staff in that office would become the professionals, Professor Kane pointed out--and they would also have the responsibility of letting students know what their rights and responsibilities are.

Will the OAI office go look up work in different fields to see if cheating has occurred, Professor Rabinowitz asked? Professor Clayton said it was not the business of the Special Committee to decide how OAI would discharge its responsibilities. The Special Committee also heard, Professor Martin commented, that more often than not students who are confronted with a charge of cheating will admit it. Moreover, Ms. Hackett added, one does not have to charge a student; one can simply say that they have reason to believe this is not all the student's work and can they explain it.

Mr. Rice asked how much students would be involved with the operation of OAI and what happens to a student who is falsely accused? Professor Kane responded that such a student would have a lot more protection than he or she does now. The innocent have nothing to fear but a lot to gain, Professor Clayton said.

The idea is not to enlarge the administration, which is something he never favors, Professor Clayton commented, but because the responsibilities of the OAI and the academic integrity officer will be considerable, it would not be effective to add these responsibilities to those of an existing office or individual.

What happens if a student charges another student with cheating but OAI says there was no cheating, Mr. Reed asked? He then loses all credibility and becomes the enemy. There is no incentive to allege cheating. Professor Clayton asked what the basis of the charge might be. If OAI finds no cheating, but there had been, that would be a subversion of what the Special Committee intends--and expressed doubt that this would happen very often.

If one is out get an ex-boyfriend in trouble, Professor Rabinowitz said, this sets up a situation that achieves the opposite of academic integrity. There is an assumption of guilt, there is surveillance and reporting, etc. Academic integrity means people take it upon themselves to be good citizens, not reporting and surveillance.

Professor Kane took issue with Professor Rabinowitz again. She reminded the Committee that there were allegations that 400 papers had been written for 21 individuals. A lot of this kind of thing would not happen if instructors had not looked the other way. The Special Committee is making recommendations on what the University should do to create a culture of integrity and make it clear that integrity is taken seriously. In addition, Professor Martin added, Committee members

are looking at this in the context of what the University is NOW; if the important recommendations are implemented people will have a greater consciousness about their responsibilities. This report does call for a culture change, which is a large undertaking.

To achieve a culture change in that sense, Professor Rabinowitz maintained, means that one's work is the currency and all that one has. This will not happen by signing pieces of paper and creating oversight committees. People will have integrity because they feel their work is valued and they are held in high esteem. This report is not about that. Both Professors Clayton and Martin took exception to Professor Rabinowitz's claim and said that the report asserts the importance of academic integrity in students' work from the beginning of every student's University career on. The program recommended is meant to reinforce that importance at every turn--and the recommendations are not punitive.

Professor Clayton noted that the Special Committee had been provided with survey data indicating that 70% of freshmen at the University are concerned about cheating and believe the University should do something to prevent it. The goal is not to seek, find, and punish cheating; the most prominent part of the report is concerned with making academic integrity not only the concern but the practice of every student in the University--and not only students.

Professor Hamilton thanked Professor Clayton for joining the meeting.

Mr. Street said he was offended by the language indicating that undergraduate students are the problem. Professor Martin responded that that is not what the report says. What the Special Committee heard, and what the report reflects, is that graduate students and students in fields such as law and medicine who, if they are caught cheating, are OUT, and where applicable, the cheating is reported to professional societies. They KNOW or ought to know the consequences. And it is not only undergraduates who are asked to sign the statements.

A number of units have honor codes that are more stringent than the recommendations in this report, Professor Kane observed, and they take cheating seriously. They have to, Professor Humphreys agreed; there is too much at stake. In some graduate school curricula, Ms. Altaf commented, it is also more difficult to cheat because the student works so closely with the faculty. In addition, every graduate student has to go through training in ethics, Professor Hamilton said.

This is about oversized classes in rooms that are too small, Professor Rabinowitz contended, situations where faculty cannot teach classes. She changes books and requirements each year so having material from previous years won't help students. Some faculty do not do that because they are underpaid and overworked and it bears on the time they have to give to graduate students.

But the University must start somewhere, Professor Hamilton observed. People must also be mindful, Professor Kane said, that instructors make it easy to cheat and thus create a culture of cheating.

Why are there not penalties for faculty, asked Ms. Altaf? Why are they all imposed on students? There is no requirement to teach a certain way, Professor Martin said, because faculty are guaranteed academic freedom and moreover the faculty is not the primary problem.

Professor Hamilton said the report can be debated further in the Senate, and adjourned the meeting at 3:30.

-- Gary Engstrand

University of Minnesota