

Minutes\*

**Senate Committee on Educational Policy**  
**Wednesday, January 19, 2000**  
**1:00 – 3:00**  
**238 Morrill Hall**

Present: Judith Martin (chair), Wilbert Ahern, Steve Fitzgerald, Darwin Hendel, Gordon Hirsch, Emily Hoover, Karen Seashore Louis, (George Green for) Christine Maziar, Kathleen Newell, Marsha Odom, Riv-Ellen Prell, Tina Rovick, Richard Skaggs, Rita Snyder, Thomas Soulen, Craig Swan

Regrets: Suzanne Bates Smith, Steven Sperber

Absent: none

Guests: John Blanchard, Jennifer Bohac, Cindy Kato, Colleen Evans (Academic Counseling and Student Services for Intercollegiate Athletics); Mary Ann Ryan (Director of Housing)

[In these minutes: web registration; athletic academic counseling; calendars; bookstores]

**1. Web Registration**

Professor Martin convened the meeting at 1:10 and turned to Vice Provost Swan for comments. Dr. Swan said that that web registration system the preceding day had not functioned well but that it was getting better. The problem was with the "ramp meters" that had been put on the system; there were traffic jams on the ramps. Changes are being made in an effort to avoid the problem; it may be that students who need to register will go to the head of the line, in front of those only seeking information, and that perhaps there are other ways to make information available.

Asked about late fees, Dr. Swan said that if a student simply registers late, there will be a fee, but if the student tries to change classes and receives a fee not because of anything he or she did, the University will always waive the fee. The fees were adopted to influence behavior, not penalize students when the system cannot respond.

**2. Athletic Academic Counseling**

Professor Martin next welcomed John Blanchard, Director of Academic Counseling and Student Services for Intercollegiate Athletics to talk about the program he directs and to review concerns about issues that affect student-athletes. The Committee, she recalled, has heard previously about the difficulties student-athletes have getting into majors.

Mr. Blanchard noted ruefully that the date of this meeting marked his first anniversary at the University and commented that it had been "fun." It has been a difficult year for him and the staff. They

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have learned a lot; the scandal hit the program, University, and state hard and the effects will linger, he said. The dismissal of four people provoked great sadness. They are now taking steps to ensure that such a scandal never again occurs.

Mr. Blanchard observed that he now reports to the Executive Vice President and Provost's office, to Vice Provost Craig Swan, a change in the reporting line that he favored. He said he appreciated what Drs. Swan and Bruininks had done for his office and he invited Dr. Swan to comment. Dr. Swan pointed out that this change was one of a number that the President announced in December. He said that he and Mr. Blanchard are in daily contact, and that he believes there is now in place a sound program in academic counseling for athletics. The concern of the academic counseling office is not athletic eligibility, he pointed out; it is the student's academic progress and how they balance the stress of athletics and academics. Eligibility is determined in the Office of the Registrar. Mr. Blanchard came from the University of North Carolina where he held a similar position; he brings to the University a significant record of success and has been recognized nationally for his leadership.

Mr. Blanchard thanked Mr. Swan for the accolades. He then told the Committee that he believes the academic counseling unit to be a very good one; the structure is important, but the people are more important. He introduced some of the senior members of his staff, who later in the meeting explained their responsibilities.

The unit has work to do in rebuilding relationships and trust with the rest of the University, and he is involved in a number of meetings this semester to achieve that goal--this is the first of them. What is NOT being rebuilt is the day-to-day operations of the unit; the people on the staff who work with students are excellent; they work closely with the colleges, the career centers, and the writing centers--the academic counseling office cannot be an island, nor does it want to be.

Mr. Blanchard then reviewed the mission statement for the academic counseling office, which is currently being reviewed by the Assembly Committee on Intercollegiate Athletics. It is key to note that mission is to "assist in the development of educated, responsible, self-reliant men and women as they pursue" a degree. An elaborated version of the statement provides that the office will conduct its affairs in a manner "consistent with the highest of ethical standards," "provide a congenial support program that fosters academic success and develops leadership," and "emphasizes the primacy of student-athletes' academic responsibilities." The people in the office know the standards, he said, and if they cross the lines they will be addressed with severity. However, that is not a concern, he emphasized. Further, students can pursue degrees and compete--in that order. It is difficult, he said, but it can be done.

Mr. Blanchard provided the Committee a list of the majors of student-athletes, by team, and noted the diversity. In response to a question, he said that a number of student-athletes with GPAs in the 2.0 - 2.5 range do have a problem getting into majors. There remain some second-tier admissions standards [which are a violation of Senate policy], and even when there are no secondary standards, when a program has only a limited number of spaces for majors, they look at GPA in determining who will be admitted. Many student-athletes, for instance, are interested in the sports study major but are unable to be admitted.

Assistant Director Colleen Evans said that the problem exists particularly for students at the 2.0 - 2.3 level, although it is difficult to pinpoint exactly which majors are the problem. It is usually in areas in which the students are interested, such as Kinesiology (which requires a 2.5 GPA). The Committee

discussed second-tier admissions requirements and graduation requirements; no unit is permitted to impose a standard higher than 2.0 for admission or graduation without permission from the Provost.

One Committee member noted that there is a group of under-prepared students in athletics; how are they dealt with? What percentage of the athlete population are they? Mr. Blanchard said that this is a reality and one reason why the academic counseling office exists; it is one of the focal points that must be addressed if an institution is to have an athletics program with integrity. It is important that the University be very careful when recruiting and admitting these students because it is not in their or the University's best interest to admit them if they have no chance to graduate. The University must say "no" to some.

His office has a role in admissions, Mr. Blanchard said; they do not have veto power. Theirs is one of many voices when special review cases arise. One Committee member related that even the Admissions Office cannot know about every high school district in the country; a student from one of the ten worst districts in the country came to the University with all As and Bs and could not make it in CLA. Admissions standards, moreover, would not prevent such students from being admitted.

Dr. Swan said that the experiences of groups of student-athletes are also being tracked so that there is a structure in place to work with students who come from disadvantaged academic backgrounds and to work with coaches over time. Coaches will not be given the benefit of the doubt if they do not develop a track record of emphasizing the importance of academic work. Coaches, Mr. Blanchard commented, have an enormous impact on the academic performance of their student-athletes.

Ms. Evans said that they work closely with college advisors, especially for General College students, on course choice and placement, and they have good relationships with them so they do not duplicate services. 15% of the athletes are in GC, and 35% of the first-year athletes are in GC. Those students are concentrated in certain sports. It was said that General College offers wonderful support and advice to students; Mr. Blanchard said that athletes in GC must have advisor approval for their courses, as is true for all colleges.

Cindy Kato, Learning Programs Coordinator, explained to the Committee how the study program for student-athletes works. It provides tutoring and skill development for those with weak academic skills; they have 4.5 learning specialists, each of whom has about 20 clients who they see at least an hour per week and sometimes more. They also do diagnostics and refer students for appropriate attention when they can. As they build student skills, they refer the students out to advisors and campus offices; they also alert individuals if there are personal or medical problems that must be dealt with. Ms. Kato said that there were consequences for students who did not attend meeting with the learning specialists, and they work with the coaches, because if the coaches do not think it important, neither will the athletes. His job, Mr. Blanchard added is to work with the athletic directors to be sure that coaches are supportive; they in 95% of the cases. They are working to have 100% support, but they will not set up times for meetings for athletes and then not have them show up.

One of the tools they use with student-athletes is a year-long academic plan, Ms. Evans told the Committee. Student-athletes have priority registration, but they are not permitted to register before they have completed their plan. They talk with the athletes about the number and kinds of credits they need to be eligible and that will lead to a degree, their course choices, and where they need to be in terms of

admissions standards. College advisors must approve the plans and may make changes in them. Only then may the student-athlete register, she said, and they are sticklers about this.

They also send out mid-term requests for grade reports. If the news is bad, they go to the coach with their reaction. Coaches are very supportive, and they do make a difference. The red flag might come from a number of sources, Mr. Blanchard said, and may arise because of a non-academic problem such as health or emotion. If the student does not go to class and is failing, however, that is not a counseling issue; the coach must insist the student go to class.

Assistant Director Jennifer Bohac next informed the Committee about the student development activities, which are part of the NCAA life skills program. They look at community involvement, personal development, leadership, and work on building the "total person"; the phrase they use to describe their work is "backpack to briefcase." They are bridge-builders with services on campus to help students succeed. They also bring athletes to high schools, set up pen-pals, participate in food drives, visit hospitals and boys and girls clubs, and the like--the athletes serve as ambassadors for the University.

One Committee member observed that it has been said that student-athletes do not mix well with other students. Does she have a sense that athletes are separate? They are, Dr. Bohac said, because of their training and practice, but they want to know other students. It may be that non-athletes are intimidated by athletes. The separateness is in part a consequence of the tremendous time demands on athletes, Mr. Blanchard added. Dr. Bohac's office schedules outreach activities around the athletes' schedules. One also hears, said one Committee member, that student-athletes receive a lot of services that non-athletes do not, and there is a sense among some students that it is not a level playing field for all.

To what extent is time management a general problem for athletes, and how is it dealt with, asked one Committee member? It is difficult, but with discipline time can be managed, Mr. Blanchard responded. They work on it with the athletes. That is the first task they take up with incoming students, Ms. Kato commented; it is an ongoing issue with some, depending on their family background and level of maturation.

How are time demands determined and what constraints are there on them, asked another Committee member? There is NCAA legislation that limits the time that athletes are to be required to devote to athletics (20 hours per week in season, 8-9 hours per week outside of the season of competition), but those limits do not include weight training; it is like saying faculty teach six hours per week, Mr. Blanchard said. Athletes laugh at the idea that they only have to spend 20 hours per week.

How different is it for athletes who must practice and train many hours per week and non-athletes who have to work 20-30 or more hours per week? A lot of students are up against the same kind of time demands, one Committee member pointed out. Ms. Evans pointed out that athletes must meet academic progress requirements to remain eligible for both competition and financial aid, but said she is sympathetic to students who must work long hours to put themselves through the University. These are services mandated by the NCAA, Mr. Blanchard commented; the University recruits these students and ask them to compete on its behalf, and their names are in the paper, so providing this support does not seem unfair.

Mr. Blanchard thanked the Committee for the opportunity to meet with it and said he would be glad to return with any additional information it might wish. They want the athletes to have a good

experience and to succeed academically, he concluded. Professor Martin thanked Mr. Blanchard and his colleagues for their comments.

### **3. Calendars**

Professor Martin now welcomed Mary Ann Ryan, Director of Housing, as she introduced the next item, the calendars, "the issue that never goes away." One concern of the Committee, she related, is the impact of the calendar on Housing.

Ms. Ryan told the Committee that they need time to clean the residence halls after Spring Semester, and there is a lot of cleaning to do at that time. The current schedule is one they like, with a week break after Spring Semester and a break after Summer Session. The summer conference schedule is stopped August 18, although they do house, after that time up to the day school begins, the band, student-athletes, and some others. Housing could make do with the week break after Spring Semester if it came after the Intersession, but they would need to move students around more.

Dr. Swan observed that the Committee is trying to set calendars for three years out when the University is only half-way through the first year on semesters; there may be some learning that has to take place. There is also a lack of agreement on the campuses about what they want their calendars to be; UMD may wish to be similar to the Twin Cities, Morris may want a long break during Fall Semester, perhaps around Thanksgiving, Crookston has not reached agreement on what its calendar should look like.

There was talk during the semester conversion process about having semesters of 75 days, but that seems not to be occurring. Do other institutions have 75-day semesters? Not many, responded another Committee member, and that includes some of the most distinguished research universities. There has also been a great deal of grumbling about having finals run through December 22 or 23, added another Committee member; this is not a great calendar.

It was reported also that the Registrar intends to return to the 72-hour requirement for turning in grades because so many grades were late after Fall Semester. A number of Committee members expressed surprise and dismay at this announcement, and it was agreed that this issue would be brought back to the Committee for discussion.

Discussion turned to the start date for Spring Semester. On the Twin Cities campus, classes have been set to start after the MLK holiday. Other campuses have decided they do not wish to begin that late, so that students are done earlier in the spring. One Committee member said that it would be helpful in some programs to start earlier in January (e.g., agricultural disciplines) and so that the Intersession did not start after Memorial Day. One possibility would be to start classes earlier when the MLK holiday falls later in the month. Michigan, it was noted, starts the day after New Year's Day, and does not begin significantly earlier in the fall.

As for the quest for a common calendar for the University, Dr. Swan said that if a student can start a term on one campus, finish and then transfer to another campus without overlap, that is as "common" as the calendars need to be.

It was agreed that the Registrar's office would prepare alternative calendars with classes starting earlier in January.

#### **4. Bookstores**

Professor Martin welcomed Bob Crabb, Director of the Bookstores on the Twin Cities campus, to the meeting. She related that an issue had arisen because of an email that had been sent to a large number of faculty soliciting their assistance in promoting book sales to students through Varsitybooks.com. She related that she had tried to get in to the Varsitybooks.com web page, and found it difficult; the University bookstores' web page, by comparison, was much easier to deal with.

Dr. Swan said that he had heard from a number of faculty about the message; they thought it was wrong and unethical because the invitation included the offer of "kickbacks" to faculty from sales of texts to students in their classes. The message also violated University email policy, which prohibits use of the system for business. The question is how the student obtained all the email addresses; most likely by going through the University directory.

Mr. Crabb reported on the results of competitive shopping they had done last fall, using six students to shop six on-line vendors of textbooks; he reviewed the results of the effort. Only two of the sites were really in the business; four were quite marginal, and the results from the attempts to purchase texts from them were so bad he didn't even report them. The on-line vendors have a bad "fill rate," (they can send only about 25% of the books ordered) and the actual discount for orders is about 8%, contrary to the 40% that they advertise). Shipping was good.

In most cases, on-line vendors are not a good source for used textbooks, which can lead to savings of 25% or more for students. The vendors often say they sell used texts, but try to get purchasers to buy new texts. There is also a default option that says the vendor can send a new text rather than new, unless the buyer stipulates that they cannot do so.

This is a business in its infancy, Mr. Crabb commented, but suggested that there are several factors that may mitigate against it growing. The bookstores tested their own e-commerce site last fall, without fanfare, and have rolled it out for spring. It is set up so that when a student goes to the site, it automatically displays the courses for which the student has registered (as of the night before) and the texts that are needed.

There is no intention to undercut bookstores on the other campuses, Mr. Crabb said in response to a question about the advertisements in the DAILY; he said he did not realize other campuses read the DAILY. The Twin Cities bookstores do not compete with the bookstores on the other three campuses. The course information that appears on the screen for a Twin Cities student would not do so for students at other campuses because the bookstores have no link to registration on the other campuses.

One Committee member said she had written back a strong letter in response, but one colleague asked if the faculty were over-reacting. The faculty need education about the ethical and community values that this kind of issue raises; that someone was industrious enough to find the email addresses of so many faculty means that this incident will be repeated. Faculty must also understand that this is not a way to save students money, in addition to being unethical.

Dr. Swan pointed out that the University cannot stop this kind of email if it comes from a commercial email address. There are issues about the quality of service; what the bookstores are doing needs to be made more widely known. A 5% kickback is unethical.

A couple of things should be done, suggested one Committee member. First, the bookstores should send an email to faculty reporting their findings about purchasing from the .com vendors. Second, a policy should come from SCEP to the Senate quickly. Third, Professor Martin and Dr. Swan should send an email to all Twin Cities faculty about the Varsitybooks.com message.

There should NOT be an expectation that e-commerce competition with the University bookstores will be shut down, but there should be a ban on kickbacks, said one Committee member. The bookstores need to be more visible about the services they provide and should get the appropriate price information to the faculty.

Professor Martin thanked everyone, agreed that this would be on the agenda next week, and adjourned the meeting at 3:10.

-- Gary Engstrand

University of Minnesota