

**Senate Committee on Educational Policy (SCEP)
October 9, 2019
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 represent the views of, nor are they binding on, the senate, the administration or the Board of Regents.

[**In these minutes:** Chair's Updates; Administrative Policy: *Course Enrollment Limits*; P&A Membership on SCEP; Discussion of Team Teaching and Multiple Sections; Preparation for Liberal Education Discussion at Next Meeting]

PRESENT: Jennifer Goodnough (chair), Toni Abts, Kriti Agarwal, Julia Brokaw, June Carbone, Stacy Doepner-Hove, Sara Hurley, John LaVelle, Nathan Mukai, Katherine Scheil, Jacob Smiley, Nevin Young

REGRETS: Thomas Chase, Dan Delaney, Scott Lanyon, Bob McMaster, Robert Poch, Brian Sick

ABSENT: Otto Johnson

GUESTS: Stacey Tidball, director, Compliance and Continuity, Academic Support Resources

OTHERS: Ety DeVeaux, chief of staff, Graduate Education; Jessica Kuecker Grotjohn, assistant to the vice provost and dean, Undergraduate Education; Karen Starry, assistant to the vice provost and dean, Graduate Education

1. Chair's Updates

Professor Jennifer Goodnough, chair, called the meeting to order and gave the following updates:

- She attended the Committee Chairs' Meeting on September 26, 2019. There was no major overlap between SCEP initiatives and those of other committees. Goodnough reported that many people at the meeting had questions about the policy process, especially whether students have the chance to weigh in on educational policy. Goodnough assured the other attendees that SCEP has robust student representation.
- Goodnough said that the Post-Secondary Enrollment Option (PSEO) would be discussed at the upcoming Board of Regents meeting and that the topic may come to SCEP at some point.
- Goodnough encouraged members to submit any feedback they had on the four candidates for executive vice president and provost by October 11.

2. Administrative Policy: *Course Enrollment Limits*

Next, Goodnough turned the floor over to Stacey Tidball, director, Compliance and Continuity, Academic Support Resources. Tidball said that the Administrative Policy: *Course Enrollment Limits* was up for comprehensive review, but also that it had received more comments outside of its comprehensive review period than other policies. Especially on the Twin Cities campus,

many students had questions about whether departments were really allowed to cancel a course at the last minute. Tidball explained that this policy stipulates that colleges and campuses need to make their own policies about course cancellations, but that such college-level policies may not exist or may be difficult to find for reference. She clarified that she was not looking for a vote at this time, but rather feedback on the policy. The policy will also go to associate deans on the Twin Cities campus before there is a vote at SCEP, Tidball added.

Kriti Agarwal remarked that in graduate school, a course with five people enrolled is meaningful, but that may not be the case for undergraduate courses. She cautioned against a one-size-fits-all approach for determining thresholds at which a course may be canceled due to low enrollment. John LaVelle commented that it is important to consider the needs of masters versus doctoral students too, not just undergraduate versus graduate. Goodnough commented that other factors, such as whether the course is a required course or an elective, can influence the decision about whether to cancel. Tidball assured members that the decision is on a course-by-course basis. Goodnough suggested a FAQ could address some of the considerations, such as undergraduate versus masters versus doctoral courses.

Agarwal then asked how a course cancellation impacts funding for teaching assistants (TAs), instructors (especially adjunct), etc. Tidball said that there is a lot of variation. She added that Academic Support Resources (ASR) has been looking to add a section into the policy addressing student financial aid as it relates to the number of credits, as it can often be hard for students to find a replacement course at the last minute. Goodnough remarked that ideally, the department would honor their commitments to TAs and adjuncts in the case of a course cancellation. Tidball pointed out that TA assignments are not always documented in PeopleSoft, so when ASR checks to see what impacts a course cancellation might have, they cannot always tell if a TA might be affected. She encouraged members to put TAs in PeopleSoft, and ask their colleagues to do so as well. Goodnough asked if Canvas would work for this, and Tidball said that it is another data source, but that sometimes the TA role in Canvas is used for other purposes.

LaVelle asked whether there is any way to track how often courses are being canceled, the reasons why courses may be canceled frequently, etc. Tidball said she did not know, but stated that there is a process to look for “ghost courses”—courses that departments list in their course catalog but that are always canceled. Goodnough asked if ASR or someone has the power to tell departments they cannot cancel a course. Tidball replied that the policy allows cancellation up to the fifth day of the term. ASR can strongly encourage the department to continue offering the course or to offer an alternative, and departments usually do the best they can, as they do not want to make things difficult for students.

Agarwal asked whether a course can be canceled after the five-day limit if the instructor has been fired or suspended, or could the department argue that the instructor cannot be fired or suspended because there is no one else to teach the course. ETTY DeVeaux, chief of staff, Graduate Education, said she was aware of the case to which Agarwal was referring, but that it is exceedingly rare. Tidball added that this policy does not force a department to offer a class, but rather only allows cancellations without a reason for up to five days into the semester. Goodnough pointed out a much more common issue, which is faculty “powering through” health

or mental health problems because they do not want to cancel a course and negatively impact students. She suggested adding language to the policy about identifying back up instructors for all courses, adding that there is also some flexibility about who can teach a course last minute, and graduate students can be the instructor of record if necessary. Julia Brokaw stressed that if a graduate student is the instructor of record, they should be compensated appropriately, not simply given a graduate stipend.

Goodnough also pointed out that sometimes visa requirements for international students are so strict that if a student drops below twelve credits even for a few minutes while they are adding another course, their visa can be revoked. She suggested checking with International Student and Scholar Services (ISSS) on this issue.

Goodnough asked members if they supported the idea of possibly adding the ability for ASR to disallow certain cancelation, as outlined in the draft revised policy, or perhaps requiring college- or campus-level approval for last minute cancelations. She asked Tidball if students are being adversely affected by last minute cancelations, and Tidball said yes.

Next, a discussion ensued about why the policy does not pertain to Duluth. Tidball and Goodnough explained that because the faculty there are unionized, they do not have representation in faculty governance and did not want policy issues decided for them without such representation. Therefore, Duluth has their own, very similar, policy. The faculty at Crookston are also unionized, but they decided that they would adopt the system-wide policies despite not having representation.

Tidball thanked members for the input and said she would bring the policy back at a later time.

3. P&A Representation on SCEP

Goodnough then initiated discussion of P&A representation on SCEP. She explained that according to the Faculty Senate bylaws, academic professional members of SCEP must be eligible for the Faculty Senate, meaning that the majority of their job consists of faculty-like duties (teaching and/or research) and they have been at the University for 5 years at 67% time or greater. However, it was discovered that the Senate Committee on Committees had not been following this rule, at least for the past several years, and currently there are several academic professional members who are not eligible for the Faculty Senate, but who nevertheless provide valuable contributions to the committee. Goodnough asked members whether the committee whether such academic professionals should be eligible for appointment to the committee going forward, and if so, how many. She clarified that current members should be allowed to serve out their terms, regardless of the decision. She added that she feels it is important to have a tenured faculty member as chair, because of the protection offered by tenure.

Brokaw asked whether P&A have their voices heard in other ways. Stacy Dopener-Hove said she thought so, but that she felt there is value in having P&A representation on this committee. Agarwal pointed out that academic professionals such as academic advisors and graduate program coordinators are highly involved in policy. Sara Hurley asked what general skills or association with educational policy P&A members on the committee should have, and

Doepner-Hove noted that the Senate Committee on Committees has deep discussions around what people would bring to the committee, so she felt that there was no need to add additional caveats to which P&A are eligible.

Goodnough summarized that it sounded like members were in favor of allocating specific P&A seats on the committee, noting that SCEP can give its recommendation but the Faculty Consultative Committee (FCC) will have to discuss and approve the change, as will the Committee on Committees. She suggested looking at the composition of other committees with regard to P&A versus faculty percentages. She added that she would work with FCC leadership to get the topic on that agenda.

4. Discussion of Team Teaching and Multiple Sections

Goodnough then turned the conversation to the issue of inconsistent teaching in situations of team teaching and multiple sections of the same course, and how that issue intersects with academic freedom. She asked members to consider what the problem is that needs solving, what other groups and/or individuals would need to be involved, and what possible actions the committee could take (such as having conversations about University-wide best practices, considering adding wording or an appendix or FAQ to a policy, etc). She also asked members to consider whether any possible action by the committee could make an impact on the problem. Members agreed that students should be able to expect a level of consistency between sections, between the lecture and lab or discussion for the same course, or the same course in different terms. Hurley pointed out that there are some things instructors are required to do to comply with policy, and academic freedom does not allow people to break with policy.

Goodnough suggested that SCEP could have discussions with or write a letter to the vice provosts, asking them to make sure deans are aware of best practices in such situations. LaVelle suggested that the recommendation to identify back-up instructors in the case of course cancellations could be tied in.

Agarwal said that TAs often do not receive any training on how to do their job, and suggested advocating for mandatory training for TAs. Brokaw noted that other Big 10 schools have training for TAs, stressing that it is inappropriate to hire people to do a job and then not train them on how to do it, especially when it affects undergraduate learning. She observed that some departments do a good job of training TAs, but that it is inconsistent. Goodnough said that she would be happy to have a conversation about training for TAs with Scott Lanyon, vice provost and dean of Graduate Education, as she felt he would be receptive to the idea.

5. Preparation for Liberal Education Discussion at Next Meeting

Finally, Goodnough informed members that the committee would hear from Bob McMaster, vice provost and dean, Undergraduate Education, at the next meeting about the progress of the Liberal Education Redesign Committee. She asked whether there were certain points that members wanted to be sure to bring up with McMaster. Brokaw stated that many people have concerns about the process, feeling that it was not transparent or democratic, and was rushed. Goodnough said that the same conversation came up at FCC, but once the whole timeline and process was explained, it was decided that these concerns were unfounded. She pointed out that there was a

year-long committee focused only on the process, which held four or five open meetings to gather feedback from stakeholders. These meetings were well-attended. Then a call for membership for the Liberal Education Redesign Committee (LERC) went out, and there was no overlap between the LERC and the original committee. SCEP had representation on the LERC. Goodnough conceded that there was some effort not to divulge every iteration the LERC was considering, but SCEP saw the proposals at least twice, and the meetings were open and minutes published. She added that the topic would be on the docket at the November 7, 2019, University and Faculty Senate meeting and encouraged anyone with concerns to attend that meeting.

In the interest of time, Goodnough adjourned the meeting.

Amber Bathke
University Senate Office