

Minutes*

**Senate Committee on Educational Policy
Wednesday, September 21, 2011
2:00 – 4:00
238A Morrill Hall**

Present: Thomas Brothen (chair), Lee-Ann Breuch, Norman Chervany, Alon McCormick, Robert McMaster, Cody Mikl, Peh Ng, Jane Phillips, Peggy Root, Leslie Schiff, Paul Siliciano, Elaine Tarone, Cathrine Wambach

Absent: Barbara Brandt, Henning Schroeder

Guests: none

Other: Tina Falkner (Academic Support Resources); Jon Steadland (President's Office)

[In these minutes: (1) questions about grading practices; (2) advanced placement (AP) courses; (3) grading practices and transcripts]

1. Questions about Grading Practices

Professor Brothen convened the meeting at 2:00 and asked Professor Siliciano to discuss the questions he had posed to the Committee:

1. Who should have access to the gradebook?
2. Can undergraduate TAs enter grades?
3. How should faculty assure the accuracy of the gradebook?
4. What are the best practices for electronic gradebooks?

Professor Siliciano said he would like guidance from the Committee on these questions. He has heard disagreements about them, and they revolve around how the gradebook should be maintained so that it is accurate and "sanctified." Some instructors only keep their grades on Moodle or WebVista, and nothing on their own computers. That causes some to worry because TAs have access to the gradebook, there is no way for the faculty member to know if the grades on the Moodle site are accurate. (Dr. Falkner said, in response to a question from Professor Siliciano, that the only official copy of the grades is the one on the Registrar's website.) The larger question, he said, is who should have access to gradebooks.

Electronic or paper, Professor Brothen asked? Either, Professor Siliciano said. And what is the role of the instructor of record with respect to the gradebook, he asked? What guidelines are there? What makes him nervous, he said, is that in some classes grades are collected, entered, and work returned by a TA without the faculty member ever seeing the assignments.

* 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.

Professor Brothen noted that he is the faculty director for Psychology 1001, with over 1000 students; it is not possible for him to see every paper and grade submitted. He said he would not expect the faculty to process all the work in every course. Professor Siliciano agreed that one size does not fit all, but said that there should be something calling for faculty members to have some idea that the grades are accurate. He said he is concerned also that some faculty members leave gradebook maintenance up to software.

Professor Wambach said that University policy provides that faculty are ultimately responsible for grades and the student can go to the faculty member with questions. [See <http://policy.umn.edu/Policies/Education/Education/GRADEACCOUNT.html>.] The issue is quality control: Is there a process to ensure that grading is consistent and responsible? It is the faculty member's role to ensure that there is. There were concerns about who was responsible for grades, which is the reason the policy was written the way it was.

Professor Siliciano said that clarified one issue. Is it acceptable to rely completely on electronic software? It seems unsatisfactory to rely on Moodle or WebVista as the sole gradebook when there can be a large number of staff who can enter grades. What would solve the problem, Professor Wambach asked? The instructor looks at the entries the TAs make and keeps a record. The TAs can upload the information; they see the answers and the ranges. They have the TAs upload information directly on Moodle, Ms. Phillips reported, and print a hard copy in the case of emergency. They do not want to handle grades too many times because that increases the risk of error. Professor Schiff reported that she enters her own grades and also downloads them onto a spreadsheet to review them. But having them on Moodle and an independent copy is a good idea. But if you have grades on a computer, one must worry about a computer being stolen, Ms. Phillips pointed out. Professor Brothen said Moodle and WebVista provide high security and backup and are better than having grades locked in a cabinet in his office. And his computer could be hacked or stolen.

Professor Siliciano said he also had great confidence in Moodle, but there are circumstances when a faculty member would not know of a grade changed in Moodle. Ms. Phillips said that, for example, with 1100 students, and 6 grades per student per term, there is no way she could ever find an illegitimate grade change. If a TA falls in love with one of the students and gives the student a break, there is no way anyone would know.

Professor Siliciano said it is not clear that everyone who is an instructor of record has changed his or her practices. Professor Chervany asked if they are meeting the policy criterion of being responsible for the grades. Professor Siliciano was not certain that all are. Professor Chervany said that one can argue that it is a University/college/department responsibility for setting the boundaries, and while units can draw them tighter if they wish, it is not permissible to enforce tighter limits if someone is acting within the boundaries of the policy. Was the grade given accurately? Was the grade recorded accurately? Was there an official copy? If so, then the instructor acted appropriately. Professor Chervany said he believed instructors should keep records outside the electronic system because that copy is "official" if there is a conflict.

Professor Wambach pointed out that Professor Chervany's advice conflicts with the training faculty receive about having student data on personal computers. It should be on server space, Dr. Falkner agreed. His grades are, Professor Chervany said, in a secure place on the college server. But

there should be an official place to go to get a grade because it could be wrong due to hacking. There should be a separate place to put grades because common software could be manipulated or down.

Professor Siliciano agreed again that instructors should maintain a separate gradebook apart from Moodle. Professor Brothen emphasized again that with over 1000 students and many items per student, the gradebook changes by the minute. The University has dynamic systems keeping track of grades, with backups, and he said he does not feel the need to keep a separate record. His view is different for a small seminar.

Ms. Phillips asked how long a department or instructor is expected to keep the work that leads up to the final grade. The policy provides it should be retained until the end of the following (fall/spring) semester, Dr. Falkner reported. So keep it six months, Ms. Phillips remarked, and then it is to an instructor's advantage to get rid of it so there is no need to worry about security. So it is best to have a spreadsheet stored elsewhere.

Professor Wambach said this is an issue of trusting the personnel doing the grading, and not allowing personal relationships to affect grading is an issue of training.

Professor Siliciano said he appreciated the comments and had what he needed in terms of the responsibilities of the instructor of record. What people do should pass the reasonableness test, Professor Brothen commented.

Professor Wambach said that instructors should send electronic gradebooks to a central place at the end of the semester so that if one is hit by a bus, the department can help a student who has a question about a grade. Not many do so, Dr. Falkner said, but the suggestion is excellent. She said they will construct an FAQ on the point. What they see more often, however, is that an instructor has not submitted a grade; if there were a central repository, someone could help a student with a grade.

Professor Ng endorsed the FAQ, because when temporary faculty are hired, there is no way to find out about the grade once they have left, should a student have a question. The policy provides that for temporary faculty members, it is the responsibility of the department chair to keep records. Departments are also to retain gradebooks for a year, Ms. Bardouche added.

Professor Chervany said that if he were not available to answer questions, one would still need the syllabus and assignments to answer any questions. If there is to be a repository with information that will allow someone to get an answer to a grading question, it will need to contain all three elements. Dr. Falkner said that their office would not want to do that, and she noted that graded work is to be returned to the student. In the absence of the instructor, the gradebook is inadequate, Professor Chervany maintained.

Professor Ng recalled that the Committee has talked about collecting syllabi, something it would be good for departments to do. Professor Breuch said that her college and department are not doing so, nor are they keeping gradebooks. There are important points and the FAQ should be emphatic about them. Another reason to keep syllabi, Professor Wambach said, is so that potential transfer students can look at them.

Professor Brothen asked if there is any evidence of a problem for students. Professor Siliciano said he was aware of a case where a student altered a grade on an assignment and the faculty member did not realize it. That is what started the discussion.

Professor Schiff inquired how the message would be delivered to departments so that they know to change their practices, if necessary. Communication is a struggle, Dr. Falkner agreed, and they don't have a ready solution. Professor Ng said that in her view, it is the responsibility of the chief academic officer to convey the responsibilities to the colleges and campuses, and in the Twin Cities, to the deans.

2. Advanced Placement (AP) Courses

Professor Brothen turned to Vice Provost McMaster for a report on AP credits.

Vice Provost McMaster distributed handouts with data on new entering freshmen. There is not a big story here, he began, and said that the data for the 2011 incoming freshmen is not yet ready.

For fall, 2010, the percentage of new entering freshmen coming in with credits was 73.6% on the Twin Cities campus and 62.1% on the Morris campus (the numbers were lower on the other campuses). The average number of incoming credits, for those who had them, was 19.6 on the Twin Cities campus and 20.2 at Morris; this includes AP, PSEO, etc. Fall 2009 students (new entering freshmen) completed about 30 credits in their first year (29.9 on the Twin Cities, 29.3 at Morris). These were in addition to any credits the students brought from high school.

Dr. McMaster next noted data on the average number of AP credits students brought to the University in for the four years ending fall, 2010, by college. The numbers, he noted, are trending up in almost all the colleges. In a few cases, students brought in as many 76 AP credits, and the maxima across colleges ranged from 23 to 76.

Dr. McMaster provided data on the AP scores received by course. (For example, for ARTH1001, fall 2010, 12 students had a 3, 14 students had a 4, and 6 students had a 5, so 32 students received AP credit for that course that semester.) In fall 2007, a total of 8,545 students had AP credits for University courses (some of those 8,545 are the same student with AP credits in different courses); in fall 2010, that number had increased to 10,889 students. The numbers are up in almost every course, Dr. McMaster observed, and some are up significantly. He said he will bring the 2011 data to the Committee as soon as they are available.

Ms. Phillips noted that the AAR scores (the combination of high-school rank and test scores used in admissions decisions) are going up, so the University is enrolling better students.

Professor Wambach recalled that there was discussion about increasing the score that the University would accept (e.g., from 3 to 4). Dr. McMaster said that Writing Studies believes strongly that the freshman writing requirement should not be waived for students who have an AP score of 3. He brought that idea to this Committee but there was pushback about changing it, in part because of course access; Writing Studies would need an additional 634 seats (which, at 25 students per section, would mean an additional 25 sections of freshman writing). Could the University accommodate that demand?

It must, Professor Tarone said; if it admits the students, it must teach them. But they would not need to be in a class with an AP score of 3, if the University continued to accept it. Professor Chervany agreed with Professor Tarone: The University waives the requirement for students with a 3 but the Writing Studies people say it should not do so. The tradeoff has to be recognized. The same is true in Math, Dr. McMaster reported; the Math faculty believe a student needs to have a 5 on AP test in order to bypass introductory calculus. Professor Ng, a mathematics professor, agreed.

Professor Breuch said that with respect to writing, issues of plagiarism and how to do research may not be topics a student learns about in high school.

Dr. McMaster said that it is his view, based on University standards, that it should not give credit for students who have only a 3 on the AP tests, but he recognizes that colleges struggle to offer enough sections in some fields—at a time of budget cuts. He said he'd like further conversation with the Committee on this issue; if it supports requiring a 4, he would be prepared to make the case.

Ms. Phillips recalled that she was one of the people who resisted increasing the requirement because whether a student has a 3, a 4, or a 5 does not predict performance in upper-division courses. But those are old data, she said. A change in the requirement need not be across the board, Professor Schiff said. If Writing Studies believes students with an AP score of 3 should still be required to take 1301, and Math believes a 5 is required to waive calculus, who else but this Committee could say anything about it? The University may not have the money right now but raising the required score, where appropriate, should be the goal. Dr. McMaster said that he went to the CLA Dean and said CLA had to offer 25 more writing sections, the Dean would say that CLA does not have the money. Professor Schiff said that Dr. McMaster should go to the Provost about this, not the Dean.

Professor Ng said she's thought about this. If the University grants credit for a 3 on the math test, and the student cannot do calculus 1 but is allowed to bypass Calculus 1 and proceed to Calculus 2 anyway, what is the gain to the University? The student will most likely flunk Calculus 2 and need to re-take it. She said she could not see the plus side of continuing to grant credit for lower scores. And if the University can't teach them, it should not admit them, Professor Tarone added. They would not necessarily flunk, Dr. McMaster said, but they may struggle.

Plagiarism is the biggest part of the introductory writing course, Professor Breuch told the Committee.

This is a testable proposition, Professor Wambach said. It is possible to look at the grades of students who are granted credit for a 3 on the AP test. In writing courses, one could find out if there are more complaints about plagiarism. In math, if students have an AP score of 3 and register for the second-level calculus course, do they pass? On the latter, Dr. McMaster said, many of the students are advised into introductory calculus even if they did have a 3 on the AP test. There is also a math placement test, which they do not have for writing, Ms. Bardouche pointed out. Professor Ng said she was surprised that students with an AP score of 3 or 4 would be placed in a pre-calculus course; if they have taken calculus, they should be placed higher than a pre-calculus course.

Ms. Phillips said that they do not accept BIOL1009 for the major (a class for which students can be given AP credit), and their objection to the AP test is that there is no lab with it. But students

can count those AP credits toward their liberal-education requirements. They should not be able to do so, Professor Schiff said. Someone should look at the AP exams to see if they meet the liberal-education requirements. Ms. Phillips said they know that some school districts offer the AP course but do not have the money for the lab. That same problem may exist in math for some school districts, Dr. McMaster said; they do not have the resources to offer the fourth year that the University will begin requiring, which is why the University is developing online options.

Dr. McMaster asked if Professor Brothen might appoint a small ad hoc group to look at AP and PSEO credits and come back at the end of the year with recommendations. The group could gather data and test hypotheses. Professor Brothen agreed to do so; Professors Breuch and Wambach and Ms. Phillips agreed to serve on the group, and Dr. McMaster will also provide a representative. Professor Brothen said the group should pursue Professor Schiff's point about obtaining the data needed to answer questions.

Professor Brothen thanked Dr. McMaster for his report.

3. Grading Practices and Transcripts

Professor Brothen turned next to a set of questions posed to the Committee by Professors Cramer and Jacobs, chair and vice chair of the Faculty Consultative Committee (between the * * *):

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TO: Members of the Senate Committee on Educational Policy
FROM: Chris Cramer, Chair, and Walt Jacobs, Vice-chair, Faculty Consultative Committee

The grade that a student receives upon completion of a course that employs A–F grading at the University of Minnesota depends on many factors and is interpreted by many different entities having access to students' transcripts. Consideration of course grade point averages across campuses, colleges, and levels of courses (for most recent 2010-2011 report, see www.umreports.umn.edu/framework/prompt.aspx?reportid=306), makes clear that a uniform standard for grading practices is not in place, although in principle Senate policy establishes the meaning of various letter grades (see <http://www1.umn.edu/usenate/policies/gradingpolicy.html>).

Some schools across the United States, including Research I universities like Cornell and the University of North Carolina, have recently begun to include in their transcripts additional information designed to set individual student grades "in context". For instance, Cornell reports median grades awarded in a course, and UNC provides extensive information about the percentage of students receiving various grades. (See, for additional background, <http://chronicle.com/blogs/measuring/qa-the-uncertain-future-of-transcript-reform/27456> and <http://www.news.cornell.edu/stories/May11/FacGrades.html>)

Given the disparity in campus/collegiate grade distributions and ongoing developments associated with setting grades in context at other U.S. (and international) institutions, it is appropriate for the University of Minnesota to evaluate whether its grading practices are consistent and informative to inside and outside readers of student transcripts.

Specific questions that we ask you to consider are:

With respect to internal grading practices:

- 1) The Senate policy cited above states, for instance, that an A grade represents: "achievement that is outstanding relative to the level necessary to meet course requirements". Is it reasonable to maintain such a policy when many courses award majority or exclusively A grades? Does a course having nearly 100% A grades then imply that the course requirements are set unrealistically low? Should Senate grading policy be modified to more properly reflect existing grading practices, or should instructors be encouraged to more closely adhere to existing Senate policy?
- 2) What justifications exist, if any, for having different median grades for courses in different colleges (or on different campuses)? What justifications exist for having different median grades for courses taught at different levels (i.e., 1xxx, 2xxx, etc.)? Would there be value in recommending target ranges for median grades in certain courses as a function of size, college, campus, level, or any other factors?
- 3) When the nature of a course dictates that passing students all receive precisely or nearly the same grade (e.g., courses with near 100% As awarded), what are the advantages and disadvantages associated with the A–F grading scheme as opposed to S–N?

With respect to those to whom transcripts are delivered:

- 1) What is the full range of "consumers" of University of Minnesota student transcripts? What degree of responsibility does the University have to ensure that the reporting of transcript grades provides value to each group of consumers? Are current practices (e.g., any language presently on transcripts) sufficient to inform such consumers of the meaning of grades in terms of student performance?
- 2) How do different consumers interpret grades differently, if at all? What is the best mechanism to ensure transparency in the meaning of grades?
- 3) Would the reporting of additional information on a course-by-course basis, e.g., average grade, percentile range of students receiving individual grades, or other options, be worthwhile to include in future student transcripts? What advantages and disadvantages would be associated with providing additional context on a per-course basis? What lessons, if any, can be drawn from other institutions (e.g., the UNC and Cornell models noted above)?
- 4) To what extent should existing practices at other U.S. and international institutions influence the University of Minnesota's practices? To what extent should the nature of those other institutions (e.g., Research I, primarily undergraduate, non-U.S.) affect any degree of influence on local decisions?

[Added in a subsequent message, to clarify the questions: The charge asks about justifications associated with levels of courses, so one could certainly embed in policy/practice different standards for 8xxx vs. 6xxx vs. etc. And, obviously, we already have the situation where C is failing for the Ph.D. but not for the undergrad. If we're going to think deeply about grades, let's do ALL the issues -- even if we decide that future moves based on this exercise may be better attempted piecemeal.]

You should, of course, feel free to explore topics beyond those enumerated above that you consider to

be particularly relevant to this charge.

We ask that you provide the Faculty Consultative Committee a report of your activities and recommendations by December 31, 2011. If you determine that you will need more time to address the various issues above, please provide us in December 2011 with an interim summary of progress and an anticipated date of completion.

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The first point #1 implies criterion-referenced evaluation versus norm-referenced evaluation, Professor Brothen observed. [In brief: "Norm-referenced grading measures performance relative to other students; consequently only a few students receive 'A's regardless of how many others successfully complete assignment. . . . Criterion-referenced grading measures performance against defined criteria, so as many students as successfully meet criteria may achieve 'A's."
<http://people.uleth.ca/~runte/inflation/norm.htm>, a website that also has a brief summary of the pros and cons of each system.]

Professor McCormick said that a background question asks to whom grades communicate something. To students? To future instructors? To future employers? He said he was surprised to learn that many employers do not ask for transcripts, a fact that made him think about the question he posed. Graduate and professional schools look at transcripts, Ms. Phillips observed. As do residency programs in Veterinary Medicine, Professor Root added.

What would be lost if the University had a no-grade system, like UC Santa Cruz, Professor McCormick asked? To think about that question would help to determine what is expected of grades. Students could be at a disadvantage getting into veterinary or graduate school, Ms. Phillips suggested.

Professor Brothen commented that there is a long history of revolutions against grading falling flat.

There is another problem as well, Vice Provost McMaster pointed out: About one-third of students applying to the University do not have a high-school rank because the schools they come from do not calculate them.

Professor Brothen asked the Committee how it would characterize Professors Cramer's and Jacob's request: What do they want?

Dr. McMaster said he thought it was a suggestion to the Committee to think about providing more information on the transcript, such as the median grade in a course, to provide information to an employer or for graduate study. If someone received an A in a course where everyone received an A, that would be different from receiving a B in a course where the median grade was a C.

There are also more complex questions in the request, Professor Brothen observed.

Ms. Phillips reported that she used to advise Mortarboard, and had to demonstrate to the national organization that the average grades in the (then) Institute of Technology were lower than the average grades in CLA in order to accept some IT students whose GPA was just lower than the

national cutoff into Mortarboard. The contextual information helped them understand that GPAs were not completely comparable between colleges.

Professor Ng asked if the University of North Carolina practice includes the average grade for the course. It does, Dr. McMaster said, which lets someone know if the grade is meaningful. What about a course, such as calculus, that might have 20 sections? Dr. McMaster said he believed the average grade would be for the course, not the individual sections.

Professor Brothen agreed that the Committee could interpret the request as Vice Provost McMaster suggested. The second question #2 is a big one.

Dr. McMaster said he has looked at grading across colleges, and there are differences. There are differences between departments in the same college. It would be difficult to normalize grades, but they could be contextualized. The students at North Carolina have suggested that providing context could put them at a disadvantage; if all the grades in a course were an A, the A would not mean as much.

Some courses are competency-based (criterion-referenced), Ms. Phillips pointed out: The student keeps doing the work until he or she gets it right. That approach is required by their accrediting agency, Professor Root reported. Ms. Phillips said she believed that the same is true in the Medical School. How does this relate to the first question #1, Professor Schiff asked? Is "outstanding" just competency? Is there a difference among veterinarians between those who are competent and those who are super-competent, Professor Root asked? Professor Chervany said that he recently had occasion to search for a medical specialist, and while he only had soft data, he was confident he found the best one available in the region. That person was probably not at the top of the class, Professor Root commented. Professor Chervany agreed but said that there are different levels of competence.

One of the ways to think about this is criterion-referenced versus norm-referenced grading, Professor Wambach suggested. Some faculty members want criterion-referenced grading, Professor Brothen observed, while others want norm-referenced (so that, unlike Lake Wobegon, not all are above average).

Professor Chervany reported that in the Carlson School, grade distributions for each individual course are anchored on the median grade. For example, the median grade for an MBA core course must be 3.3 +/- .1. The percentage distributions for the other grades are up to the instructor. If a class does not meet that standard, the associate dean will contact the faculty member and have a discussion concerning the reasons for the reported deviation. This standard and the need for a discussion have led to widespread achievement of this standard—a standard that was adopted by a vote of the entire faculty. The school is trying to acknowledge that there are differences in levels of achievement in classes, but the standard does force the faculty to wrestle with the question.

Professor Chervany also said that contextual information would be useful for someone trying to interpret a transcript—and it should be noted that there are different standards for graduate and undergraduate courses. Carlson students would benefit from the policy change, he said; an A student can demonstrate that he or she was on the upper end of the distribution.

Ms. Phillips commented that the language of the grading policy contemplates a C as the average or middle of the scale—but if a student receives a D in a major course, he or she must retake it. C's are not in the middle, B's are. If the C is to be in the middle, programs need to start accepting D's.

Vice Provost McMaster and Dr. Falkner both suggested again that contextual information could be a disadvantage for students applying to graduate or professional school. As for going without grades, Dr. Falkner suggested that without a GPA, students could also be at a disadvantage because they would not have the comparative datum that other students have. She added that at Harvard, most students receive A's their first year. Until that is the norm everywhere, putting context around grades will put Minnesota students at a disadvantage.

Professor McCormick asked if there is information available about what the University's peer institutions do, such as in the Big Ten. Dr. McMaster said it is his sense that their transcripts are just like Minnesota's, without contextual information. The only difference might be that some institutions do not have pluses and minuses. What about published grade information from peers, Professor McCormick asked? Ms. Phillips pointed out that *The Chronicle of Higher Education* has had articles about grade inflation that included data, so it must be available.

There are disciplinary differences, Professor Wambach said. Science and Engineering grades are a full grade point below the grades in CLA. That has always been true. The faculty within a discipline recognize what grades in that field mean, so the lack of context is not so important for graduate school within the discipline. Professor McCormick related that in his field, Chemical Engineering, they ask a lot more of students in senior courses, when they will soon be sending the student out to function as an engineer, than they do in lower-level courses, and what they ask for is different from achievement in the course.

Professor Brothen provided the data for all (and each of) the seventeen 3xxx-level courses in his department for fall, 2010. Overall there were 35% A's, 34% B's, 18% C's, and 4% D's/F's. Is this the data that FCC wishes, he asked? If, for one course, for example, if a student received an A, the transcript would also record that 21% of the students in the course also received an A?

Professor Chervany said the Committee did not know the answer to those questions, but he could speculate on two questions. One is whether the faculty are distinguishing different levels of competency throughout the University. A second is whether, if many students receive an A, should the standards be raised and perhaps courses made richer or more advanced. Students are better and able to accomplish more, on the input side, so courses should contain more.

Does everyone agree that there are different levels of competency, Ms. Phillips asked? Within a discipline, Professor Chervany said, people can, echoing Professor Wambach. CS&E grades are lower than those in CLA. If 80% of the students in a course receive an A, is the instructor saying he or she cannot distinguish between the abilities of those students? If the answer is yes, then one can say that the instructor should put more material in the course. He said he is nervous if grades do not distinguish between levels of competency. If they do not, then something is wrong with the curriculum or its delivery.

Ms. Phillips said that the students being admitted to the University (or at least the Twin Cities campus) are very different from the students who were admitted a dozen years ago. There is grade creep because the students are so much better. So is the answer to raise the standards now so that they make the students look worse? Professor Root observed that she could prepare an exam, full of arcane points, that would be so difficult all students in the class would receive a C, but that doesn't seem reasonable. Professor Chervany said his question is whether one can do more, given the students. He has taught statistics and could add more to the class. Professor Root said her job is to produce entry-level veterinarians; Dr. McMaster said there is a difference between professional-school classes and undergraduate classes.

Vice Provost McMaster asked if Professor Root seeks a minimal level of knowledge needed for competency—but could ask for more. They could, Professor Root responded; most of their students are good students. They do not receive a lot of A's but they also receive few D's and F's.

Professor Schiff said, apropos of the request for an interim report in December, that it would be difficult to provide such a report because there are so many questions. She said she would like to know what the real questions are—it is difficult to get a grip on what the Committee is being asked to do. Professor Ng suggested inviting Professor Cramer to the meeting because this Committee does not know the motivation behind the request. Is the idea that faculty should interpret grades in the same way?

Professor Tarone noted that Professor Cramer cited the Senate policy, but it is obvious the definitions do not hold across disciplines. Maybe the problem is that the policy says something that is patently not the case. That language is old, Professor Wambach said; it dates from 1922 and is interesting to think about. One question is how big a scale one needs to create judgments about students. Right now it's a 5-point scale (A-F). How many points are needed? There are also pluses and minuses. There is a need for D's and F's, Dr. McMaster said, because some students do fail—or come close to it. There needs to be that anchor. But the faculty are mostly using only five points, Professor Wambach said.

Ms. Phillips said, in response to Professor Ng, that people are using the policy standards. When they grade student work, they try to calibrate across all the TAs. But that is difficult and it takes a lot of time. The University does not want to go down the path of trying to get all faculty members to agree on what A, B, C, etc., mean.

In terms of audiences for grades, Professor McCormick said, peers have not been mentioned. All have access to the grades but many instructors may not know it. Perhaps faculty should be made more aware of this before adding information on the transcript. Instructors could be asked to look at grade distributions in their department and college. That would be Committee action that could respond to Professor Cramer's request, Professor Brothen said. Professor Wambach agreed with Professor McCormick: If the faculty would look at the data, and the variability of the data, they might ask questions of themselves about what to make of the numbers. (If the data are to be shared with all faculty in a department, Ms. Phillips suggested making it visually easier to digest, rather than presenting tables of data.)

Professor Brothen said he would meet with Professor Cramer to get a further explanation of what he is looking for and ask if he'd be willing to join a meeting of the Committee.

Professor Schiff pointed out that the data are available on UM Reports, and it would be a benefit to obtain the data and start a conversation. In her college, they have an informal rule about grades: 20-30-40-10 (that is, 20% A's 30% B's, 40% C's, and 10% D's and F's). Many faculty have even thought about the issue and grade in a vacuum. The question is how to get the information to people and start the discussion.

Professor Breuch said that the discussion has started here. The question for Professor Cramer is what policy issues he is raising. Is it enough to identify the policy questions or does the Committee need to prepare a report?

Professor Brothen inquired of Vice Provost McMaster if his colleagues at other institutions around the country are concerned about this issue. Dr. McMaster thought not. The question about adding a normalizing statistic to the transcript is a good one, although one needs to ask if that will help or hurt students. He said he does not worry about the rest of the questions; grading is always idiosyncratic, with a great deal of variance, and that is OK.

If there is a need to look across the University at grade distributions, Professor McCormick asked, is that something this Committee would do or something that Dr. McMaster's office would do? That would be the official look, Professor Brothen said; the first suggestion is that departments should look at their own practices.

It has been policy for a long time that the Committee presents data to the Senate each spring. Informing the faculty has been part of the policy, Professor Wambach pointed out. But if adding the median grade to the transcript is proposed, that would be a policy change. Putting the median grade on the transcript would not affect a student's GPA, Professor Tarone said; the median grade is for someone examining a transcript course by course. The question arises when grades do not differentiate between top students and when there are variations across disciplines.

Standards and expectations for graduate courses are quite different, Professor McCormick said, and suggested the Committee limit its inquiry to undergraduate courses, at least to begin with. Professor Tarone agreed, but added that instructors put out a set of grades every semester and that GPAs control people's lives. One of the most important things the University does is certify, Professor Brothen agreed.

Professor Brothen said he would contact Professor Cramer, and adjourned the meeting at 3:55.

-- Gary Engstrand