

MINUTES*

Senate Committee on Educational Policy
Wednesday, February 24, 1999
1:00 – 3:00
Room 238 Morrill Hall

Present: Judith Martin (chair), Darwin Hendel, Gordon Hirsch, Laura Coffin Koch, Darcia Narvaez, Kathleen Newell, Martin O'Hely, Jeff Ratliff-Crain, Palmer Rogers, Tina Rovick, Richard Skaggs, Thomas Soulen, Steven Sperber, Craig Swan

Regrets: Robert Johnson, Christine Maziar, Suzanne Bates Smith

Absent: Shumaila Anwer, Laura Beauchane, Angela Bos,

[In these minutes: Twin Cities curriculum subcommittee; teaching award re-eligibility and eligibility for both awards; policy on repeating a course; upper limit on tuition discount; Senate action on policy proposals]

1. Twin Cities Curriculum Subcommittee

Professor Martin convened the meeting and began by distribution a list of individuals who have been nominated to serve on the Twin Cities Curriculum Subcommittee, the group that is to serve as the hearing body in the case of complaints about curricular offerings. She asked that if the names were acceptable, she would send a letter indicating the individuals have been nominated and asking them if they agree to serve. It is hoped that the Subcommittee can begin its work this spring.

Staffing is to be provided by the Provost's office; the chair is to be appointed by the chair of SCEP in consultation with the Provost.

Professor Martin said she did not know of any issues that needed to come before the Subcommittee, but that perhaps the IMG Oversight Committee may have some. It may be that the Subcommittee will not have a great deal of work.

The Committee approved the list of names.

2. Teaching Award Questions

* These minutes reflect discussion and debate at a meeting of a committee of the University of Minnesota Senate or Twin Cities Campus Assembly; none of the comments, conclusions, or actions reported in these minutes represent the views of, nor are they binding on, the Senate or Assembly, the Administration, or the Board of Regents.

Professor Martin next related that several questions have arisen about the teaching awards: is anyone eligible to win the same award twice, is anyone eligible to win both the Morse-Alumni Award and the graduate/professional award, and if the answer to the latter question is affirmative, can they receive two salary supplements?

Several Committee members spoke in favor of the proposition that no one could win the same award more than once. It was noted that an award winner is so designated for the remainder of his or her career at the University and that with only eight winners permitted for each award each year, the number of possible winners is probably significantly lower than the number of faculty who might be qualified. One concern that has been expressed is that previous award winners receive a lower salary augmentation than current, or possibly future, winners; there appeared to be agreement that "things change" and that the augmentations of present, future, and past award winners cannot be made equal. (This year, on a one-time basis, all previous Morse-Alumni award winners who had not received a permanent salary supplement were granted a \$1000 permanent supplement.)

It was also agreed that no individual could be nominated for both the Morse-Alumni award and the graduate/professional award in the same year, but that anyone could win both awards at different times. The Committee also agreed that if someone were to win both awards, they should receive two salary supplements.

In order to clarify these questions, it was agreed that the Committee would redraft the existing policies after receiving comments and suggestions from the two nominating committees.

3. Repeating a Course

Vice Provost Swan next reported that the Council of Undergraduate Deans (CUD) had raised a question about the provisions of the grading policy and the uniform undergraduate practices with respect to repeating a course. At present there is, by SCEP decision, no limitation on the number of times a student may repeat a course, although the transcript will show all attempts and grades earned in each attempt; only the last grade will count in the student's GPA. CUD raised a question about course access: the University is putting much money into ensuring adequate course access, but there are still instances where the demand exceeds the supply of seats; is it fair to let students who have earned a passing grade enroll in a course again, presumably with the objective of raising their GPA? CUD was told of one instance when a student who had obtained a "B" took the course again in order to obtain an "A," and was of the sentiment that once a passing grade has been earned, the student should not be permitted to enroll for the same course again.

A related matter, although not directly on this point, was the case of students who enrolled for the second term of a sequence when they failed the first term. Those students

were not ELIGIBLE to enroll, and were “deregistered.” That led to a discussion in CUD about the advisability of requiring mid-term grades once the change to semesters has been made, in order that students can know they are in trouble in a course. Such a requirement would probably not be feasible under a quarter system.

A number of points about course repetition were raised in the discussion.

-- Would a restriction on repeating a course hurt students who are trying to get into programs where admission is highly competitive, if other institutions permit unlimited repetition? That would depend on the transcript policy; at the University, there is “full disclosure”: all registrations and grades appear on the transcript. Other institutions may not record every attempt.

-- Data from a few years ago suggested that there were 161 course repetitions, out of over 100,000 registrations. If the number of students who repeat courses is VERY small, that is not a reason to change the policy, and the issue should be dealt with as a course access problem.

-- This is in part an advising issue. Students who obtained a passing grade but wish to repeat a course to improve their GPA need to understand that doing so will have only a very small effect on the GPA. On the other hand, if they want to repeat a course because they did not adequately learn the course material, then they may need to take it again. This raises the question “what does a ‘C’ mean?” To some, it is a poor grade; to others, it is fine, indicating they did acceptably in the course. (This is why, observed one Committee member, the recent report of the grading subcommittee urged departments to discuss the meaning of grades in their field. A “C” is supposed to mean the student met the basic course requirements.)

-- The instructor should have control over course repetition; approval could be required. (That may work for smaller campuses or colleges, but in cases of large colleges, where the instructor may change from term to term, that may not be workable.)

-- If a student obtained a “C” or better, repetition should be discouraged, but if they need the course for their career, a waiver could be granted. It is also unfair to students, because they are unlikely to get that much from taking a course again.

-- That there were only 161 course repetitions suggests relatively few students repeat courses, and it is likely that most took a course again for good educational reasons. Students should not be encouraged to repeat a course, and advisors should tell students that doing so will not help their GPA very much--and that students who repeat courses to increase their GPA in order to get into competitive programs probably will not get in anyway if they are on the edge.

-- If students want to repeat a course in order to increase their understanding of course material, especially if they obtained a passing grade the first time, they should audit the course the second time; that is a legitimate way to increase understanding and demonstrate the seriousness of their intent. Another possibility would be to require course repetition to be on a pass/no-credit registration.

-- Some professional schools tell prospective students that they need an "A" or "B" in a course to be admitted, so students are sometimes forced to repeat course in which they have obtained a passing grade. This may also be true for majors to which access is restricted.

-- It is a violation of the grading policy for a department or instructor to deny access to a student who wishes to repeat a course, no matter the grade the student received the first time.

It was agreed that Vice Provost Swan would work with Ms. VanVoorhis to obtain data on the number of students who repeat courses. For the moment, the Committee concluded it would make no change to the policy.

4. Tuition Banding Upper Limit

Professor Martin next turned to Professor Hirsch, who explained that he believed that with the proposal to offer tuition at half-price for students who enrolled for 13 or more credits, there should be a cap on the half-price offer so that students do not "pile on" credits. He said he strongly supported tuition banding (the half-price offer), but that it should not be unlimited. He reported that he has spoken with CLA advisors, who expressed some concern; they did not want to approve registration for a student who wished to take a large number of credits, and the tuition proposal will give students a financial incentive to do so. At present advisors must approve registration for more than 20 credits, and they do so when it appears reasonable; without clear guidelines, they would be in the position of guessing if students are trying to manipulate the system--putting them in a difficult position.

The intent of the tuition discount is to encourage students to enroll full-time, to take approximately 15 credits per semester, and there should be range (13-19 or something similar) which qualifies for the discount. It is not difficult to imagine a student close to graduation who wants to save money so who enrolls for a large number of credits and takes a number of Incompletes to finish the following quarter.

The tuition policy, if adopted as is, will encourage students to take Incompletes. There are already too many Incompletes given, and they are tough for faculty to deal with. It was noted that if faculty follow the rules, an Incomplete is only to be given in extreme cases, and registering for too many courses is not a good reason. (It was reported that present policy on Incompletes allows one year to make them up. One department requires a student to take the course over. If that policy were widely adopted, it could serve as a significant deterrent to

taking an Incomplete. The problem, it was said by another, is that that could then lead to course access problems.)

There are also sound educational reasons for not permitting students to take a large number of credits. There should be a line drawn at some reasonable limit.

One Committee member urged that this be thought about in terms of workload. By Senate policy, for the usual student, 18-21 credits implies 54-63 hours of academic work per week. That needs to be taken into account.

Another Committee member inquired if the University really wished to put a financial disincentive on students when this is an educational issue. It is best to take less than 20 credits, and but if a student takes more, he or she will be fined; this burden should be on advisors.

One Committee member responded that the burden on advisors is exactly what should be avoided; if they had the authority to TELL students they could not take an excessive number of credits, perhaps that would be acceptable, but they have no such power, and can only jawbone students. After a time, advisors get tired of doing that, and don't. Jawboning also takes more time that advisors do not have; colleges are not staffed with enough advisors to take on this role. Another added that this is an academic issue, and students are not being punished. They need to be told they will not do well taking a large number of credits. It was also maintained that it is not a penalty to impose higher tuition on a large number of credits; it is removal of an incentive. ANY change in rate is both a penalty and incentive for all students. Students still receive the discount for credits in a range.

It was suggested that any modification to the tuition plan should be the same as existing rules about requiring approval for registration: students may take up to 20 credits without approval, so they should be permitted to take up to 20 credits and still receive the tuition discount.

The Committee then voted unanimously in favor of a proposal to advise the Provost that the tuition discount should be discontinued after 20 credits. Given that the Regents have had the tuition discount plan presented for information, and are expected to act on it at their March meetings, Professor Martin said she would immediately communicate the recommendation to the Provost and to Dr. Zetterberg.

5. Report on the Senate/Assembly Meeting

Professor Martin reported that the Reorganization Policy was not forwarded because the Provost requested at the last minute that the Senate hold off on acting on the policy because he and the deans wish to comment further; as a result, at the Senate meeting she

moved to table it. She said that she intends to seek the comments, but will place it on the docket of the next Senate meeting.

The academic progress policy was tabled, on motion of a student member of the Assembly. She and Vice Provost Swan will speak with MSA about it. Some see the proposal as punitive for students.

One difficulty the Committee has had is that undergraduate students have failed to attend Committee meetings; their views are important, but the Committee has no way to obtain them.

One Committee member inquired about the source of the authority that certain departments and programs have exercised to require students to be full time. The only answer was that they have always done it that way, but there are legitimate reasons, especially in medical fields, about ensuring currency of training and the need for space. Nor, it was noted, is there automatic credit given for courses taken long ago, in any program.

Professor Martin then inquired if there were particular educational policy matters that Committee members wished to have thought about, as the agenda loosens up somewhat during spring quarter. She then adjourned the meeting at 2:30.

-- Gary Engstrand

University of Minnesota