

Minutes*

**Senate Committee on Faculty Affairs
Tuesday, September 21, 2004
2:15 – 4:00
238A Morrill Hall**

Present: Morris Kleiner (chair), F. R. P. Akehurst, Matthew Bribitzer-Stull, Bruce Brorson, Carol Carrier, Dann Chapman, A. Saari Csallany, Janet Ericksen, John Fossum, Patricia Frazier, Richard Goldstein, Darwin Hendel, Theodor Litman, Steven McLoon, Kathleen Sellew, Oriol Valls, Larry Wallace, Timothy Wiedmann

Absent: Jesse Daniels, Wade Savage, Aks Zaheer

Guests: Jackie Singer (Director of Retirement Benefits); Kathy Pouliot (Employee Benefits)

[In these minutes: (1) welcome and introductions; (2) on-line benefits enrollment; (3) recommendations of the ad hoc subcommittee on the evaluation of instruction; (4) committee objectives for the year]

1. Welcome and Introductions

Professor Kleiner convened the meeting at 2:30, introduced himself, and called for a round of introductions. He noted that during discussions Committee members may request that their comments be off the record, and that everyone will have a chance to review draft minutes before they are circulated publicly.

2. On-Line Enrollment

Professor Kleiner turned to Mr. Chapman for a brief discussion of on-line enrollment. Mr. Chapman said that a big change this year is that open enrollment will be on line via computer, if one has changes to make. This change will improve access (anywhere, any time) and resolves privacy concerns (accidental distribution of paper copies of benefit choices to the wrong individuals). Enrollment books (very generic) will be sent in mid-October. Beginning October 4, everyone will be able to view their current benefits on line.

They are aware of concerns about people who do not have access to computers (either for physical reasons or because of a lack of computer literacy); Mr. Chapman explained the steps they are taking to be sure all individuals will be able to make benefits changes as needed.

It was noted that the cost of family medical coverage is expected to increase by about \$600 next year, and the cost of prescriptions will increase about \$500. Mr. Chapman said that as the University moves to cover 85% rather than 90% of costs for family coverage, the cost will increase about \$600 next year. The maximum out-of-pocket cost for prescriptions will increase from \$1000 to \$1500 for families. Did the bargaining units agree to these changes, Professor Goldstein asked? They did, Mr. Chapman

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responded; these arrangements were all made two years ago, in response to the University's budget difficulties.

Are there any surprises coming after next year or is it too early to tell, Professor Kleiner asked? It is too early to be specific, Mr. Chapman said; the Benefits Advisory Committee is now working on the Request for Proposals for the period 2006-2009 or 2011, so there could be a different group of plans beginning January 1, 2006. The University will review proposals next year and have plans ready for open enrollment in 2005 for coverage starting January, 2006.

Will there be a change in pharmaceutical coverage, Professor Kleiner asked? There may be, Mr. Chapman said. There is talk about changing from four pharmacy benefit managers (built into the providers) to a single pharmacy benefits manager across the University plans. The change would provide significant benefits; with a single formulary, the University could work with one vendor and get messages to employees about cost-effective medications, it would have an advantage in volume purchasing, and would be in a good position to identify what it is really paying (right now pharmacy costs are wrapped into the charges from providers).

Relatedly, the University is also considering the potential for a University-owned pharmacy on the Minneapolis campus that would do both mail-order and walk-in service, because they have learned that an employer-owned pharmacy can get the deepest discounts on medications. Ms. Sellev asked about establishing a pharmacy branch in Canada; Mr. Chapman said that is still "iffy" because the federal government continues to take the position that purchasing from Canada is illegal. The University will be watching what the State does. Professor Fossum asked if there is any potential increased liability with a University-owned pharmacy. Mr. Chapman said they are exploring that issue and have experts looking at it; he has not been made aware it is a particular problem. The University already has a pharmacy in Boynton that has not been a problem (and the Boynton site is one possible location for the new pharmacy). Would it offer both prescription and non-prescription drugs, Professor Kleiner asked? That will depend on the facility, Mr. Chapman said; Boynton has both. The driver behind the idea, however, is prescription drugs.

They are also in the final stages of bringing a MinuteClinic to Coffman Union that would be open during the academic year, perhaps 10:00 to 5:30 during the week, in order to make access more convenient.

Vice President Carrier reminded the Committee that the University has a 25-30-member employee advisory group (the Benefits Advisory Committee) that has been extremely helpful. It is the only University committee that represents EVERY employee group (bargaining unit employees do not vote but they do participate); it is a very knowledgeable group that has been an extraordinary resource for the University.

Professor Kleiner thanked Mr. Chapman for his report.

3. Subcommittee on the Evaluation of Instruction

Professor Kleiner next asked Committee members to review certain of the recommendations from the report of the Subcommittee on the Evaluation of Instruction submitted last spring. The recommendations, from the executive summary, were these:

6. Departments should state in writing which items on student rating forms will be used to evaluate instructors. Department heads should receive results from only those items.
9. Little can be done about inappropriate comments other than instructing students and providing faculty with guidance on interpreting comments.
10. Students should never be required to complete rating forms nor should students be given course incentives to complete the forms. Instructors should never know which students have completed forms.

Before discussing them, however, Professor Kleiner asked Professor Hendel—who served on the subcommittee—to provide a brief summary of the work of the subcommittee. Professor Hendel related that the subcommittee met intensely for one semester and was able to address a wide range of issues and understand a set of complicated processes. There were different perspectives represented on the subcommittee but the report represents the views of the whole group. The focus was on the evaluation of instruction, and primarily the student evaluation of instruction rather than peer evaluation.

Professor Goldstein asked about recommendation #7: "Procedures for instructors giving permission to post results from the student release questions should be simplified to promote higher release rates. Student release questions should never be used for making personnel decisions." Professor Hendel said the subcommittee believed the level of understanding in the University about what one must do to release the evaluation results is every uneven, although there have been more efforts in the last six months to increase the understanding. The subcommittee did not delve into what should be done to simplify the process. There has been a lot of thought and discussion about releasing all the results, Professor Goldstein said. Right now the information is considered personnel data, Professor Hendel said, and the Minnesota Data Practices Act does not allow the institution to require the release without the consent of the instructor.

What does "release" mean, Professor McLoon asked? Everyone sees his results—students, the department, his faculty colleagues. He said he has never been asked if the results can be released. That illustrates the very different practices across units, Professor Hendel commented. What release means is that if a faculty member agrees, the results will be on a web site that students can look at. The subcommittee focused on the release of results to students, not on the ways the results become public in different colleges.

Professor Kleiner turned to recommendation #9 and asked how individual comments, some of which are inappropriate, fit into the numerical ratings of an instructor, and whether they would be public. Professor Hendel said that individual comments would not be public; in some cases, they go only to the instructor; in other units the department chair also receives them. Not most units, but some. What is done with inappropriate comments, Professor Kleiner asked? Professor Valls said that departments decide; there is nothing that can be done about such comments.

What is done with the numeric evaluations when they include inappropriate comments, Professor Kleiner asked? Some argue the numeric evaluations should not be included when the form also includes inappropriate comments. Professor Hendel said there was no recommendation to exclude or include numeric results depending on what was written on the form. Professor Valls said there will always be some small number who write inappropriate comments and they should just be ignored.

Professor Hendel said that negative or positive comments may have more impact than does just seeing the data. The issue is who should see the comments. He said he believed they are most relevant for the faculty member; more widespread distribution can create false impressions because of the strong impact of a single comment.

It was noted that the Committee may recommend whatever it wishes on this point, as it formulates a policy recommendation in concert with the Committee on Educational Policy. Professor Fossum noted that one recommendation of the subcommittee was to replace the three existing policies with a single policy; the Committee can decide if it wishes to recommend uniformity in how comments are treated and what can be disclosed (with respect to the latter, there are limits imposed by the law).

Professor McLoon said he felt deeply about this issue. He said he never felt the form the University uses is an evaluation of instruction. Giving a test at the start of a term and at the end would provide the best measure of instruction. The University form is a measure of popularity; he said he moved his ratings up a full point by telling a joke at the beginning of each class. He questioned whether one could get anything useful from the University form other than a score used at merit evaluation time. He said he asks students to provide a one-page evaluation of the course and a one-page evaluation of the instructor, and they make changes in the course on the basis of those evaluations. The forms, however, are not evaluation of instruction and do not make school any better; he continues to tell jokes so he can get a pay raise but said the system is broken.

Professor Brorson agreed and applauded the work of the subcommittee, which he said provided a reasoned discussion of a subject the Committee needs to get its hands around. There needs to be a policy that units can agree on. His department, he said, does a number of things independent of what the University requires.

Professor Valls said the subcommittee report lacks intellectual content and only speaks to how to wiggle things around a little. There is a difference between two objectives; the basic question is whether evaluation is trying to find out about the course, about the instructor, or both. Whatever questions are asked should address one of those two questions. The report is not asking fundamental questions; it should start from the beginning, ask what the research shows, and go from there. Professor Akehurst responded that the subcommittee did look at the research, which shows that evaluations are effective in evaluating instructors. The research shows they CAN be effective if the right questions are asked, Professor Valls said. The questions measure student attitudes, not learning, Professor Kleiner said. They CAN measure learning, Professor Valls maintained. They are picking up something, Professor Kleiner said, although maybe it is not what one wants. Professor Akehurst repeated that the research shows that student ratings are reliable and valid. Professor Valls said that if one looks at the references one finds that is not true. Professor Wiedmann commented that the Committee has moved to more global questions and should focus on the three recommendations.

Professor Goldstein said he was not the greatest defender of student evaluations but he felt he must defend the report and the evaluations. As a department chair for many years, he saw the student evaluations for all the faculty in his department; there is a strong correlation between high numbers and good teaching. Students are not frivolous when they fill out the evaluations; they know what the results will be used for. The evaluation forms are not perfect but they are useful. There is a question about

dissemination of results but he would not knock the system. The results are of most use to the individual instructors.

Professor Csallany urged that there be an overall University policy so that all units treat the evaluation results the same way. The numbers should go to the department head and the comments should go only to the instructor. One negative comment could wipe out the effect of five or ten good comments. Professor Ericksen disagreed; she said she has seen inappropriate comments that are useful—for example, one can see a correlation between comments and racism. One then looks at the numerical scores with a different eye. The comments can explain numerical scores in important ways.

With respect to inappropriate comments, Professor Wiedmann contended that they are racist or sexually harassing and it is unacceptable to say that nothing can be done about them. The University has a responsibility to protect faculty from such behavior and it should track the forms of students who make such comments. There is no right to privacy when a student is sexually harassing an instructor. Tracking the forms would not be difficult to do with computers: one can break the code and identify students who engage in this behavior. Professor Goldstein said that if anonymity were eliminated it would ruin the system; anonymity cannot be removed. Professor Valls repeated that nothing can be done; there will always be a few idiots who take advantage of anonymity to do something stupid. Professor Hendel emphasized that the subcommittee said the University cannot prevent a student from making inappropriate comments; they did NOT say the University can do nothing about them if the comments are made.

Professor Bribitzer-Stull suggested the University could consider empowering administrative staff who type up the comments to remove those that are obscene. Professor Valls said that faculty are grown up, have seen comments like this before, and said they are not a big deal. Professor Wiedmann responded that there is Board of Regents' policy requiring that employees be protected from sexual harassment. It was noted that this issue originally came up at a Faculty Consultative Committee retreat a few years ago, when all of the female members of the Committee had angry stories to tell about the comments that they had received on course evaluations—and they startled the male Committee members with the depth of their reaction to these comments, Professor Goldstein recalled. He said that the University should instruct students about what they can put on evaluation forms; he said he does so in his classes. Departments and the University should consider sending email messages to students about the importance of the evaluations, telling them not to be flippant and to avoid racial, sexual, and any other kind of harassment. It would also be possible to have people read instructions to students before they fill out the forms, Professor Kleiner added, although that would be more expensive for departments. Currently faculty must leave the room, Professor Litman noted. The written instructions for the form should also tell students not to make inappropriate comments, Professor Csallany said. One can do all these things, Professor Akehurst observed, and some students will do it anyway, Professor Wiedmann said it was not a problem of educating students, and Professor Valls repeated his belief there was nothing the University can do about such comments.

Professor Valls moved that the Committee approve #6 and #10, and commented that #9 is not a recommendation but rather an observation. Professor McLoon said #9 was vague and agreed it was not a recommendation. Professor Goldstein said #9 is defeatist; it should say the University should strongly emphasize to students that they should not make such comments. Professor Hendel agreed that #9 is not a recommendation and pointed to the specific recommendations in the text of the report, which the subcommittee described as obvious but weak solutions:

- The SET instructions should state that harassing comments or comments on irrelevant factors are not helpful for evaluation of instruction. These instructions should be worded in a manner that does not turn students away from the rating process.
- Faculty should be provided with guidelines on how to process and interpret open-ended student comments, particularly those that are inappropriate.
- Inappropriate comments should never be used by the department as data for evaluating an instructor.

After further discussion, the Committee agreed it would take up the specific recommendations in the report rather than the statements in the executive summary. Professor Valls suggested that students be instructed in a way that discourages inappropriate comments. What if the comment a student wants to make is not inappropriate (e.g., the instructor IS a racist)? In that case, it was said, the comment is not harassment or inappropriate.

In terms of not using student comments for evaluation of the instructor, Professor Wallace commented, that is like the judge telling the jury they did not hear what they just heard. This information is NOT confidential in many departments, and that is where the problem is. It is not whether the instructor sees the comments, it's who ELSE sees them. Merit evaluation committees can also use the scores in the wrong way; he said that Professor Hendel could talk about the enormous difference in teaching across the campus. In the case of courses with multiple instructors, students have told him they resent having to fill out separate forms for each instructor in the course. Professor Hendel said this issue came up at the subcommittee and it had no specific recommendation on the point.

Professor McLoon said that one of the charges to the subcommittee should have been protecting faculty, and one recommendation should be that any evaluation should include the context of the faculty member's role (did he or she give one lecture in a course or over half the course?).

No other issue generates strong and more varied responses than student evaluation of instruction, Professor Hendel commented. When new people get involved in the discussion, there are different views expressed, all of which are valid. The subcommittee had a limited time and did not address all the issues. The University has had a system in place for a number of years but little attention has been paid to how it is working, what its problems might be, and how it could be improved. There may also be things the University could do to focus more on student learning in the evaluation process. There are other kinds of evidence that can be used to evaluate instruction; student evaluation is an easy system, which in part is why the University uses it.

Part of the problem, Professor Valls said, is that one does not know if it is evaluation of the course or of the instructor. If it is the course, then separate forms for each instructor are not needed. If it is the instructor, then it should be conducted only when an instructor played a major role in the course. He also said that the recommendation that EVERY course be evaluated is a problem because the instructor of record may have little to do with the actual instruction; he or she may be more of a facilitator and students will be thinking, for example, more of the lab instruction than the actual instructor. Evaluation of the course and the instructor should be done differently. The report is disappointing in that

fundamental issues were not thought through. If the subcommittee did not have enough time, it should have said so.

The Committee voted to table further discussion of the recommendations until the next meeting and agreed to invite Professor Durfee, chair of the subcommittee, to join it to discuss the recommendations. If the subcommittee recommendations are endorsed, Professor Ericksen asked, can the Committee also say that this is not the end of the discussion? It can, Professor Kleiner said, given the comments about student learning.

4. Committee Objectives for the Year

Professor Kleiner handed out copies of his suggestions for Committee objectives for the year, developed from the earlier work of the Committee. They are:

- Review faculty role in the salary determination process: How has this process evolved, and do faculty have an adequate voice in the determination of merit salary increases;
- Review of the application waiting period for the Faculty Retirement plan for new faculty, and the tuition reduction for dependents of University Employees;
- Faculty teaching load;
- Appointment procedures for endowed chairs and use of endowed chairs funds; and
- Consistency of policies allowing and providing for maternity/paternity leaves.

With respect to the first item, the Senate adopted a policy concerning salary determination that left much up to departments. There is a wide range of practices, from the faculty setting salaries for everyone in the department to the department head deciding (because the faculty have said they do not want to waste their time on the issue). Professor Kleiner said he would like the Committee to be informed about what departments are doing, what role the faculty have in the process, the outcomes, and whether the faculty believe the process is fair. Vice President Carrier said that she can issue a call for statements on what departments are doing. Professor Kleiner said that would be helpful in evaluating the policy; he noted that it has been said that many faculty and administrators in the Academic Health Center are unaware of the policy saying that the faculty can decide if they want a voice in setting salaries.

With respect to eligibility for the Faculty Retirement Plan, should there be a consistent policy? The Committee will also continue to inquire about tuition reduction for University employees.

The issue about faculty workload is whether or not there has been a speed-up because of the change from quarters to semesters, Professor Kleiner said. Professor Goldstein said that the issue arose primarily in CLA, which changed from requiring five courses per year under quarters to four courses per year under semesters. The Committee should obtain data about teaching loads, he suggested. Professor Kleiner agreed.

On the matter of endowed chairs, Professor Kleiner said, there is a clear statement about an individual's tenure but there are questions about the duration of appointment to an endowed position. Is someone appointed in perpetuity? There are over 500 endowed chairs at the University; to what extent are appointments at the discretion of the dean or department head and to what extent do the faculty have some say about the selections? A related question is whether the University may impose internal taxes on endowment funds.

The Committee needs also to look into the consistency of application of policy regarding maternity and paternity leave, Professor Kleiner said, because there have been suggestions that it is not being uniformly applied.

Professor McLoon suggested that the graduate student fringe benefit rate should be added to the list. When the Committee learned that the Senate Research Committee is looking at the issue, it agreed to await the outcome of the deliberations before taking up the issue.

Professor Wallace returned to the issue of evaluation of instruction: he noted that units can make up their own forms. Professor McLoon related that he had asked if it infringed on his academic freedom to be told HOW he must evaluate his courses. He was told that it is, and he took the comment to heart; he does not use the University's form.

Professor Kleiner adjourned the meeting at 4:15.

-- Gary Engstrand

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