

Minutes*

**Senate Committee on Educational Policy
Wednesday, September 17, 2003
1:00 – 3:00
238A Morrill Hall**

Present: Emily Hoover (chair), Wilbert Ahern, Victor Bloomfield, Dale Branton, Vernon Cardwell, Shawn Curley, Gretchen Haas, Frank Kulacki, Geoffrey Meisner, Marsha Odom, Karen Seashore, Mary Ellen Shaw, Mary Sue Simmons, Craig Swan, Joel Weinsheimer

Absent: Martin Sampson, Douglas Wagensteen

Guests: Professor John Ramsay (American Council on Education Fellow)

[In these minutes: (1) committee charge; (2) results from the survey of graduating seniors; (3) effect of budget cuts on the educational mission; (4) undergraduate education at a research university]

1. Committee Charge

Professor Hoover convened the meeting at 1:00 and asked Committee members to review the changes in the committee charge suggested at the last meeting. One additional change was suggested: that the Committee oversee undergraduate general education requirements, rather than "review undergraduate group distribution" requirement because general education is the term now used.

In response to a question about reviewing proposals, Vice Provost Swan recalled that there is a division of labor on the Twin Cities campus: The Campus Assembly set the liberal education requirements and created the Council on Liberal Education to evaluate specific courses. To change the requirements themselves would require action by this Committee and the Assembly. Professor Ahern agreed that there is a broad understanding about the requirements for a baccalaureate degree; each campus then interprets those requirements. But if a campus were to change the number of credits required, or otherwise divert from the general understanding, any proposal would have to come to this Committee, Professor Seashore commented.

Professor Odom inquired if there is anything in the charge about the Minnesota Transfer Curriculum. There is not, Professor Hoover said; the committee charge is more general. And the Transfer Curriculum is interpreted by each campus, Dr. Swan said. Is there an expectation that each campus will participate in the Minnesota Transfer Curriculum, Professor Odom inquired? There is, Dr. Swan said.

The Committee then approved unanimously the proposed changes to the bylaws.

* 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 represents the views of, nor are they binding on, the Senate or Assembly, the Administration, or the Board of Regents.

2. Graduating Senior Survey Data

Dr. Swan distributed several pages of data providing the results of the Graduating Senior Survey. Data for the Twin Cities are from 1989, 2002, and 2003; for UMD and UMM they are from 2002 and 2003; for UMC they are only from 2003. He said he did not know why the hiatus in the data existed for the Twin Cities; the entire survey was begun (again) in 2002 for all campuses. These numbers essentially establish baseline data, he said; he was not willing to put very much reliance on changes from 2002 to 2003 because no one knows what the normal year-to-year variations will be. The strategy will be to do this survey every year, alternating between a long form and a short form (and it would be possible to do some of both forms each year).

The data for the Twin Cities campus are available by college and have been shared with the colleges. The idea is to make the results into an action agenda. These results, Dr. Swan pointed out, are separate from the general student survey, which includes a sample of all students at all levels--but which data do not include very many students from any particular college.

The survey ends by asking graduates if they have anything else to tell the University. Dr. Swan read some of the responses; some comments, he said, suggest specific things that the colleges and campuses can do.

The summary data are satisfying. General satisfaction levels on all campuses are high. The proportion of students checking the highest two levels of satisfaction on a six-point scale are UMC (89.7%) and UMM (92.5%) at the top; UMD (80.1%) and UMTC (79.9%) were also very high. For the Twin Cities campus, this same measure in 1989 was 69.3%, so there has been clear improvement. The graduating seniors on the Twin Cities campus also say they would attend the University again, if they could start over, in significantly higher numbers in 2002 and 2003 than they did in 1989.

Dr. Swan noted that there were statistically significant differences in results for various subgroups; these items get at correlates of satisfaction.

- Students under 24 had a higher level of satisfaction (81.8%) than did students 24 or older (72.3%)
- Women had a higher level of satisfaction (82.4%) than did men (76.1%)
- Students with a GPA 3.0 or higher were more satisfied (83.6%) than students with a GPA under 3.0 (70.4%)
- Students who began as freshmen were more satisfied (80.8%) than students who began as transfers (75.9%)
- Students who graduated in four years were more satisfied (85.3%) than students who took longer (72.7%)
- Students in the Carlson School had the highest levels of satisfaction (85.2%); for CLA it was 77.9% and for IT it was 75.8%; the other colleges were at 82.9%.

There were other differences that were not statistically significant.

- White/other students showed a higher level of satisfaction (80.5%) than did students of color (74%)

-- Students from Minnesota had a higher level of satisfaction (80%) than students from other states (79.5%).

Similarly, students who attended convocation, were in honors, did community service, attended Gopher sports, participated in a campus group, had a mentor, used major advising well, and so on, showed higher levels of satisfaction than those who did not. In general, Dr. Swan observed, students who are more involved are more satisfied.

Dean Bloomfield said he was struck by the fact that even the lower levels of satisfaction were in the 70% range.

Dr. Swan also distributed four pages of data containing the results by question of the 2003 Graduating Senior survey. Professor Seashore commented on how low the students' expectations were of their academic advisors. That is an issue on the Twin Cities campus, Dr. Swan agreed, and the findings have prompted a joint approach by the Minnesota Student Association and the Council of Undergraduate Deans on evaluating advising. The number one issue for students is "tell me about the University requirements and let me know if I am in trouble." Students appear not to expect as much from advising as the University thinks; they may be getting more than they expect. Dr. Swan speculated that one would get a different result if the question were asked of newer students looking forward rather than of students who are looking back at their academic career; these are graduating seniors, remember, he said. There is a need for more data to answer the question, Professor Seashore said, but it may be that academic advising could be narrowed and specialized. Or it may be that students do not expect very much because they did not have the experience of receiving very much, Dr. Shaw suggested.

Mr. LeBlanc said he knows a number of students who had trouble with advisors in their first few meetings so they (the students) expected to do things on their own. Most students had hands-on advisors in high school but they do not find the same thing in college. When students initially have a bad experience with their advisor, many will find their way on their own. Mr. Meisner said that at Duluth, advisors are packed with students and cannot keep up with them; those students who constantly show up get advice and the rest give up--they meet once with an advisor as a freshman and not again.

Professor Weinsheimer said that with respect to the satisfaction rates, they are very positive and very gratifying--but these are graduating seniors. Is it possible to supplement the survey results with similar questions to students who drop out or transfer? Graduating seniors are what percentage of incoming students? These students have graduated over a period of time, Dr. Swan noted, but last year the graduating senior number was 54% of the number of incoming students. There was a survey of students who dropped out, he said. On the Twin Cities campus, his office is collaborating with the colleges to work more intensively with students who reach 90 credits; in the smaller colleges, ALL students who reach 90 credits graduate but that is not true in the larger colleges. It also now possible to tell by the end of a registration period if a student has registered, and if not, the University can intervene more aggressively than it could before.

What kinds of intervention, Professor Weinsheimer asked? The first step is to show some concern, Dr. Swan replied. One year he sent about 2000 emails and heard back from about 150. It would be more efficient if it were the student's advisor who made the contact--and now they have the

ability to find out who did not register. Professor Seashore said that the research reveals that students who leave generally give two reasons: they got a good job or they have a family problem. One does not know, of course, if those are the real reasons, but in any case it is doubtful advising could help.

Professor Kulacki said that since the Hasselmo administration, there has been a focus on the centrality of undergraduate education; the Yudof administration continued that emphasis. Do these data reflect that new emphasis or a fundamental shift in faculty attitudes? Dr. Swan thought it was both. There are a number of activities that are part of the new agenda, but the evaluation of instruction data and long-form data demonstrate that students know more faculty well enough to ask them to write letters of reference. Dr. Swan said he interprets that to mean students know more faculty, a factor that correlates with all other measures. Professor Kulacki said he was trying to get a sense if there has been a deeper cultural change among nine-month faculty; if things are going the right direction, then hurrah, he said.

Mr. LeBlanc said there was a report in the late 1990s about why students left. Job and family were two reasons; a third was the unfriendly environment on the campus. If one could find students who did not graduate from the University, one could learn why they falter and where the University is failing, rather than just hearing success stories. Dr. Swan agreed. Colleges all have data looking at the patterns across campus, and there are critical comments on the surveys that help identify where the University or the colleges can do a better job. The University also had a reputation that many people in the service offices were not very friendly; he said he was not sure all the problems have been fixed but the University is doing a lot better on that score.

Dr. Shaw said she was concerned that the data showing freshmen students who are very traditional, who live on campus, and who have luxury of taking advantage of campus activities will not mean that the University will not put efforts into non-traditional students. Dr. Swan agreed with the concern.

Is it possible to separate residential students from commuters, Professor Cardwell asked? Dr. Swan said he could ask, but a lot of first-year students live in University housing and then move out their second year--but they move to Dinkytown or other close areas. Student involvement is critical to satisfaction, Professor Cardwell said; it has to be a motivated commuter students who sticks around for campus activities. Dr. Swan agreed that not living on campus is a risk factor for younger students. In the general student survey 58% of student classified themselves as residential and 42% as commuter, a complete change from 20 years ago. While the University has added more beds recently, it does not have residential spaces for 58% of its students, so clearly many of them are living near the campus.

Ms. Haas asked that data on students who were not successful be provided to the Committee, if they exist, and she also asked that the Committee be provided an update on the first-year experience. Dr. Swan said they would do both. She also said that it is time to look at the sophomore and junior experience, not just the first-year students and graduating seniors, in order to get an idea of the problems students face through their academic career. In response to a query from Professor Seashore, Dr. Swan said that the greatest drop-out rate has traditionally been between the sophomore and junior years--and it seems to be related to financial issues. There is some evidence that Minnesota parents do not support their children in college as much as needed. He agreed that the University needs to pay attention to retention rates during students' academic careers.

Professor Seashore said that Dr. Shaw's suggestion is critical: The emphasis has been on improving the traditional undergraduate experience. The data indicate the University has made strides; it is time to consolidate those gains and turn attention to other groups of students.

3. Effect of Budget Cuts on the Educational Mission

Professor Hoover accepted a motion to close the meeting for the discussion of the effect of budget cuts on the educational mission; the motion was approved unanimously.

During the discussion, the Committee identified the kinds of data it wished to have to evaluate the undergraduate experience in a time of budget cuts:

- the number of credits students have when they graduate
- the number of students who have a research experience
- the availability of medium-sized seminar classes for students, especially in the major
- class sizes, and especially the size of intensive-writing courses
- the impact of cuts on graduate student support
- advising loads (but useful numbers may be difficult to get because practices vary so much by college)
- the number of small courses below optimal section size (this gets at a resources issue: how faculty are deployed; it may be that there are enough faculty to handle the undergraduate curriculum but that they are not allocated in a way to do so)
- the cost of out-of-classroom experiences
- access to world-class researchers in the classroom (and correspondingly the elimination of adjuncts?)

Another item on the list was the practice of selling packets of materials and the virtual elimination of class handouts. Relatedly, the point was made that teaching budgets are pinched for expendables and such items as replacements for labs; there is a creeping effect of a little less each year.

If there is a difficulty obtaining uniform data, Professor Seashore suggested, for the Twin Cities campus data for the two largest colleges would provide a good barometer.

Professor Kulacki said there needs to be a look at the needs of the core educational enterprise, especially if faculty numbers decline. Ultimately, the University may have to "prioritize programs": Does it need small departments if enrollments in them are low? This gets into questions about what the University is and what its mission is--one cannot get around those questions, he said. He also commented that study abroad and undergraduate research opportunities are not just add-ons--they are an important part of University undergraduate education.

Professor Seashore agreed; she said that if the President is to be asked to look at reallocation, the University must revisit the process used by the Campbell Committee in the late 1980s. It is a difficult process but if the University does not engage in it, it will wither.

It is an appropriate time to revisit the vision as well as the roles and responsibilities of the University in education, Professor Cardwell said, to look at the measures of quality of programs that are core or essential to the state, and to ask what the University means when it talks about quality

education. If public support continues to decline over the next 25 years as it has in recent years, will the University be able to add faculty and programs in areas that address future opportunities? In terms of programming and staffing, he said, the University must engage students and the public in the discussion, perhaps through a blue-ribbon process to assess priorities.

One effect of the impact of the budget cuts, Mr. LeBlanc reflected, will be increased student debt, which will have an effect on the economy because those students in the future will not be able to buy houses and cars.

4. Undergraduate Education at a Research University

Professor Hoover now asked Committee members to think about the meaning of an undergraduate education at a research university (in contrast to the undergraduate education a student would receive at another kind of college or university). What is the advantage for students to come to the Twin Cities campus rather than a small college? A number of people would say that it is the opportunity for students to work with research faculty.

Professor Seashore reported that she has a niece at a small private college in Minnesota who has had three opportunities to work with faculty on research.

A number of their seniors work with faculty on research at rates higher than on the Duluth or Twin , Professor Ahern commented. There are distinctive things about undergraduate education at a research university, he said, but working with faculty researchers is probably not one of them; many Ph.D.s are from smaller colleges. The Committee needs to think about what to do with graduate students to make them more cost effective.

Dean Bloomfield said that if one criterion is work with faculty, then liberal arts college have an advantage. He cited three elements that differentiate a research university education. (1) The research university's advantage is that if one cares that the person doing the teaching is a world-class figure, then the University has them. (2) In general, there is access to higher-level cutting edge equipment. (3) The research university has graduate students and provides a large part of the acculturation into research and scholarship. It is not a matter of working with faculty, but rather of the sophomore working with the senior, who is working with the graduate student, who is working with the post-doc, who is working with the senior faculty member.

The size and scope of majors at the research university is not something one sees at other places, Dr. Shaw said. She also wondered, in response to Dr. Bloomfield's comment, if the University will be squeezing graduate students out because post-docs are cheaper.

One must also remember that tuition at the private colleges is often several multiples of tuition at the University, Dr. Swan pointed out. Examples of how the University is different include a student who wanted to work with metabolic processes in horses and a class that proved a statement in a textbook to be false.

The University must admit that graduate students are apprentice teachers, Professor Weinsheimer said, and no matter how well support or how enthusiastic, they are not as good as faculty members. Faculty do learn to teach over the years. The University might end up cutting adjunct

faculty but the functions they perform still need to be performed so graduate students will take over. Adjuncts often, however, have ten years or more of experience. The University is committed to putting apprentice teachers in the classroom in the early stage of their careers, but some students are not well served by having new teachers, no matter how enthusiastic they are.

Professor Ahern agreed with Dean Bloomfield but said that graduate students are often used as a replacement for faculty. He said he knows more now about teaching than he did over 30 years ago when he began. On the other hand, Dr. Swan said, he went into economics because of classes he took that were taught by graduate students. Mr. LeBlanc said he has had graduate students as instructors who have been phenomenal; graduate students have also been some of his worst instructors. Students are in the dark about how well a graduate student will do.

Dr. Bloomfield said that when he was an undergraduate at Berkeley many years ago, there was a controversy over graduate students as TAs; he and his friends judged that the better teachers were about 50/50 faculty and graduate students. Some graduate students were terrific, some were not--but that distribution is true of the faculty as well. Some faculty may pay more attention to teaching they used to, and TAs get better training now, so one can get good teaching out of both groups.

Professor Hoover thanked everyone for their contributions and adjourned the meeting at 3:00.

-- Gary Engstrand

University of Minnesota