

Minutes*

Senate Committee on Educational Policy
Wednesday, October 7, 1998
1:00 – 3:00
Room 238 Morrill Hall

Present: Judith Martin (chair), Darwin Hendel, Gordon Hirsch, Laura Coffin Koch, Christine Maziar, Kathleen Newell, Palmer Rogers, Richard Skaggs, Thomas Soulen, Craig Swan

Regrets: Robert Johnson, Jeff Ratliff-Crain

Absent: none

Guests: Catherine French (chair, IMG Oversight Subcommittee); Tina Rovick (student member from last year invited to attend in the absence of any student appointees to the Committee thus far)

[In these minutes: Discussion with Dr. Maziar (funding for interdisciplinary activities, funding for graduate assistants); work per credit hour at the graduate level; Applied Partnership Degree Program Guidelines (partnerships with other state institutions); awards for outstanding contributions to education; summer 1999 semester courses]

1. Issues in Graduate Education

Professor Martin convened the meeting at 1:00 and turned to Vice President and Dean Christine Maziar to begin a discussion of issues in graduate education. She asked if the discussion could begin with Incentives for Managed Growth (IMG), in order that Professor French could be part of the conversation.

Dr. Maziar said it was her intent to listen. She observed, however, that in the background there is considerable concern among faculty that IMG may not provide the needed incentives to support interdisciplinary programs, there is concern about the flow of funds under IMG and that interdisciplinary research will not attract investment by the colleges, and concern that central coffers are depleted.

Right now people are concerned observers and are watching what happens in the next 1-2 years. So far, she has not seen any retreat in support for interdisciplinary programs on the part of the deans; if anything, there has been more enthusiasm for them, because of the deans' view that such programs are on the cutting edge and support faculty research and teaching interests. The success of a dean is measured by the success of the faculty, so it is in the interests of the administration as well as the faculty to support interdisciplinary activities. The compacts are also showing interest in interdisciplinary programs. The potential dangers need to be recognized, but there is no need to cry "wolf" early.

The concern for support for interdisciplinary work goes back for years, observed one Committee member, and now the worry is that IMG will create additional problems. It is too early to tell if that is the

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case. It is good advice to deans and chairs to support such activities, but some may not recognize and follow it. IMG, moreover, may HELP interdisciplinary activities by generating additional research.

Professor French raised two issues. One, the Graduate School once had funds for interdisciplinary activities; it no longer does. How will funding for interdisciplinary work be handled? Two, there has been much concern about faculty involvement in the compacts, with much of the concern focussed on interdisciplinary activities. Who speaks for these activities, and what should be the role of the Graduate School in the process?

With respect to compacts, Dr. Maziar said, she and Dr. Bruininks agree that the Graduate School should participate in the compact discussions; this will be handled primarily by Associate Dean Vic Bloomfield, although she will also attend as she is able. The deans and Dr. Bruininks agree that graduate education and research should be on the agenda, with the Graduate School tracking them. Dr. Bruininks' office has put an enormous amount of time and energy into the compacts, but the process is similar to what happened at Texas: the first year, the Graduate School was left out, and there was belated realization that it had to be included.

As far as money for interdisciplinary research, that is an issue that is still being worked out.

Drs. Maziar and Swan also made the points that the process got started late, so time for consultation was compressed (a problem that should be remedied in the next round), that the compacts are evolving documents and will not be started anew each year, and that the compacts should be built on more detailed strategic planning documents. In response to a question about whether the voices of the faculty involved in interdisciplinary programs would be heard, it was said that just because an activity is not mentioned in a compact does not mean it is not important to a college; the emphasis in the compacts is what the college is working on for that period.

Professor French reported that the IMG Subcommittee will hear about what has been happening at California, which has had an IMG system for some time. Apparently the faculty believe that interdisciplinary activity has suffered under IMG. It may be that not everything is mentioned in a compact, she said, but those which are not can be pushed to the fringe, and there needs to be a flag raised about interdisciplinary activities in the compact process.

Dr. Hendel recalled that interdisciplinary work was seen by the faculty as VERY important to the University's future when the discussions about the institutional critical measures were taking place. There was also talk of having an institutional or college measure for interdisciplinary work, but the idea was dropped out of concern that this would signal interdisciplinary work was more important than disciplinary work.

Dr. Maziar pointed out that interdisciplinary work is not an end in itself, but a way to advance faculty research and student activities – and those should be the measures. The problem at Minnesota, as at many other places, is that it has a hard time ending programs. It is easy to create new programs; it is much harder to recognize that their time has passed or that the institution no longer has the human resources to carry them on well.

One subject that came up time and again in the IMG subcommittee, it was said, was the need for institutional values to be dealt with in planning. It would be possible for interdisciplinary research to be

an institutional value, strongly conveyed. That conveyance could either be through jawboning or through the allocation of state dollars. The administration should consider the allocation of O&M funds and where interdisciplinary work fits in.

Dr. Maziar noted, apropos the central commitment to interdisciplinary work, that the major capital initiatives last year were largely in support of interdisciplinary work. It is clear that the institution is making large investments in activities that cross academic boundaries.

Discussion turned next to support for graduate assistants. Dr. Maziar distributed copies of a handout of a presentation she intended to make to the Board of Regents concerning GA compensation and benefits. She intends to explain the important role they play as research and teaching assistants and to explain the costs of supporting GAs (a stipend, tuition, and health care).

Data from Dr. Zetterberg suggest the University has a problem. In stipend, the University ranks 9th in the Big Ten; in terms of net cash stipend (stipend minus tuition and fees the student must pay), Minnesota ranks 7th; in terms of tuition plus the stipend, the University ranks 4th. The last few years have also seen an increase in the costs to departments of supporting GAs because of fringe benefit increases; over the last five years, the number of GAs at the University has dropped from 1972 to 1526 – despite more external research support. Departments are making the rational economic decision that it is cheaper to support post-docs than RAs, and to hire adjunct faculty than to support TAs. Over the short term, this means fewer graduate students; over the long term, the reputation of the University is harmed, because the reputation is built on graduate programs, and an inability to support graduate students does not bode well for the future of the University's reputation.

Dr. Maziar said she would also explain what GAs are experiencing: while they appreciate the tuition benefit, what they feel most is the net cash stipend, because that is what directly affects their living expenses. On that measure, the University is not competitive. Even worse, the stipend is not adjusted for the cost of living, and most places in the Big Ten are cheaper to live in than the Twin Cities.

To get to the Big Ten average will require \$2.3 million (to increase the cash stipend); it would cost about \$1 million to bring the net cash stipend to the average. She noted the mechanisms that might be used to deliver increases, and also some caveats. Of the latter, a more refined analysis of the data (rather than gross averages) would be helpful (e.g., Indiana, which is at the bottom of the rankings, also has no engineering and more fine arts, fields which are less costly in terms of GA support) and a cost-of-living adjustment needs to be made. Perhaps most important, if the University is to achieve its aspirations, the Big Ten is not the only comparison group that has to be considered. She pointed out that the University does compare quite favorably with other institutions in terms of the health care benefits it provides.

Several points were touched on in the ensuing discussion.

- If raising the stipend were to further reduce the number of GAs who could be hired by PIs (a concern that former Vice President Brenner expressed), that would be an unacceptable consequence, Dr. Maziar said. She suggests tuition discounting to cut fringe benefit costs in order to allow the PIs to use the savings for the stipend. Funds to permit this need to be identified; they might have to come out of the compensation increases.

- A number of GAs have been forced to take other campus positions, or off-campus jobs, in order to make ends meet. There is no systematic data on the point, but anecdotal information confirms this – students take the job at the University to get the tuition benefit, and then take an outside position to make more money. This makes it hard for students to complete their degrees in the 5-6 years the Graduate School desires. Some students have 50% GA appointments but work up to 30 hours per week to get their jobs done, as a matter of academic integrity; that also affects whether they take an outside job, but many cannot live on the GA stipend.
- Moreover, of over 7000 graduate students, only about 1500 have GA titles of some kind; that is a very large gap. The University is clearly not meeting the needs of its graduate students.
- The requirement for 36 thesis credits is not only a way to account for faculty effort, it is also a mechanism to allow externally-sponsored research contracts to support part of the cost of graduate education. And no funds for tuition are obtained when a post-doc is hired on a contract. This is another argument in favor of a discounted tuition policy.

Professor Martin said that the Committee shares Dr. Maziar's concerns and expressed the hope that the Regents would look favorably on the proposal.

2. Work Per Credit Hour

Professor Martin next drew the attention of Committee members to a handout with a proposed modification to the Senate's POLICY STATEMENT ON CLASS HOUR-CREDIT RATIO. In setting out the expectation that each credit of enrollment is to require three hours of work (counting both in and out of class time) for the average student to obtain an average grade, there is no distinction made between undergraduate work and graduate/professional work. One result is that the Graduate School bulletin cites the policy as the standard for graduate work. Professor Martin recalled that the Committee had not intended the policy to apply to post-baccalaureate work, but did not explicitly say so in the policy that was proposed to the Senate and adopted. The draft proposal would exempt graduate and professional work from the 3-hour rule.

Some believe the standard should not be different. Some worry that it will open graduate students to abuse, that faculty will set extraordinary work expectations for a 2-hour seminar, and point to the exception in the policy. But were they doing that before the policy was adopted in 1993? What would drive a faculty member to do that? It does seem that the use of credit hours is "softer" in graduate education than in undergraduate. Dr. Maziar said that if excessive workloads became known, that is a point at which the Graduate School could intervene.

The Committee worked on modest editing of the draft, and agreed to review it by email following the meeting. The Committee concluded that the oversight or "enforcement" provision written into the 1993 policy should be deleted – it has never been followed, and would require construction of a significant bureaucratic machinery to be implemented. It was also suggested that the Semester Conversion Standards be checked. [Subsequent to the meeting, it was confirmed that the Semester Conversion Standards DO draw a distinction between undergraduate and post-baccalaureate work in application of the hours-of-work-per-credit to be expected, so revision of the existing policy would be for clarification and apply to the remainder of the year.]

3. Applied Partnership Degree Program Guidelines

Professor Martin asked Dr. Swan to review for the Committee the proposed guidelines for Applied Partnership Degree Programs. Four such partnership degree programs are already established through University College; these guidelines are intended to cover any future programs that might be established. The process of setting up the first four led to the feeling that guidelines were needed.

There has been a concern among faculty about who was involved in setting up the degree programs and about what it was appropriate for the University to become involved in. This document sets out principles to guide thinking. Dr. Swan noted in particular that the document says that “fundamental to any degree program offered by the University of Minnesota is a core group of University faculty committed to working together to offer a high quality degree program.”

He then highlighted several of the assumptions and principles contained in the document:

- the proposed degree program cannot be delivered entirely by one of the Twin Cities campus colleges (if so, there is no need for a partnership)
- program-specific courses are designed in response to needs identified by business and industry representatives who participate in the curriculum design process – there is a larger workforce-readiness element in these courses
- programs should respond to demonstrated “gaps” in program availability
- the programs might be offered by any combination of UM and MnSCU institutions (UM, 2-year, 4-year)
- a core group of tenured UM faculty, often housed in different departments or colleges, is ultimately responsible for the degree program (ad hoc committees may provide curriculum design)
- the programs must be evaluated on a periodic basis, at which point the program’s viability is evaluated based on program quality, value to students and employers, program demand, and financial considerations (this is a safeguard for the University; if students are not getting jobs, or there are faculty concerns, or businesses say the program does not meet their needs, then it can be discontinued)

Other points made were that University College is the vehicle through which these programs would be offered, but the programs must be linked to the college(s), funding for the programs would be part of the compact process, and some courses could be offered by the University even if the degree is offered by one of the MnSCU institutions.

- A college which feels it has not been properly included in the discussions about a degree program, Dr. Swan said in response to a question, can go to the Twin Cities Curriculum Subcommittee.
- Students who take degrees at the University will be counted in University statistics.

-- A question was raised about whether safeguards are needed to insure that these programs are not misused by those involved in athletics.

-- There have been program proposals stopped because of significant college or faculty concern; one Committee member said the document was needed because one of the earlier programs was established over departmental objection.

-- The purpose of the document is to make explicit what had been implicit before, as well as to address principles not thought about in the first four cases.

-- Nationally, there are many institutions working together to deliver degrees that individual institutions cannot provide; in most cases, there are no guidelines and things are done on an ad hoc basis. Some institutions are more likely than others to become involved in these types of programs; Minnesota, as a land-grant, metropolitan, research institution, is probably more likely than others to do so.

-- The purpose of the institution needs to be considered. The difference between these and other degrees is the liberal education component, providing a set of transferable skills, rather than the job-specific skills that could have a short shelf-life. Without the inclusion of the liberal education component, the University should not be involved.

-- What if a department has the capacity to offer a program but declines to do so? (1) If the department says it is inappropriate to be involved in any way, it should not be. (2) If the department believes it could appropriately be a partner, then it should be. (3) If the department says "we never thought of that, and we can do it all," then it might, and there is no partnership. It is, in any event, up to the department to decide if it will participate. This point, however, needs to be made clearer in the document. If there is only minor department involvement – a small part of one faculty member's time, or something similar – full department approval should not be required.

-- One Committee member argued that the possible negative consequences of these programs (reducing faculty time for graduate programs, research, outreach, etc.) must be considered very seriously. Faculty being led to work on these degree programs can weaken a department; having faculty who do this kind of teaching will not create top research departments.

The document calls for serious consideration of the opportunity costs of involvement, it was said in response; demands on faculty time must be taken into account. The initiation of the process may not be altogether clean, but after that the guidelines provide a structure for the University to decide clearly whether a program is appropriate or not. The process is in the control of individuals, departments, colleges, and the Provost, and a degree program must be approved by the Provost and Regents to become a University program.

Professor Martin thanked Dr. Swan and Dr. Hendel for their work on the guidelines, and commented that they represent a significant improvement over the unwritten process that existed before. The Committee agreed, by lack of dissent to the proposition, that with appropriate editorial changes suggested in the course of conversation, the guidelines carried the endorsement of the Committee. It was agreed that the guidelines should be reported to the Senate for information.

4. Recognition of Outstanding Contributions to Education

Professor Martin reported that plans are under way for establishment of the Academy of Distinguished Teachers and the award for outstanding contributions to graduate and professional education. As part of these plans, the annual salary augmentation (adjustment to base salary) for Morse-Alumni award-winners would be increased from \$1500 to \$3000 (which adjustment would also be provided to those who win the graduate/professional award), and that the amount provided to the recipient's department would be changed from \$2500 for three years to \$1500 for five years – the same total but spread over five years, a term consistent with membership in the Academy.

The Committee then agreed on the names of individuals who would be asked to serve on the committee to designate the winners (subject to final approval by this Committee).

With respect to the graduate/professional award, Professor Martin reported that she and Dr. Swan suggest there be nine members, seven faculty, one graduate/professional student, and one other individual.

It was also reported that previous winners of the Morse-Alumni award who are not already receiving a base supplement will receive a \$1000 augmentation to their base salary.

The Committee agreed that in light of the establishment of the Academy, it will revisit the question of eligibility for renomination for the award.

5. Summer Semester Courses

Professor Koch reported that the question of whether departments would be allowed to offer semester courses in the summer of 1999 was being explored.

Professor Martin adjourned the meeting at 3:00.

-- Gary Engstrand