

Minutes\*

**Senate Committee on Educational Policy**  
**Wednesday, May 14, 2008**  
**1:30 – 3:30**  
**238A Morrill Hall**

- Present: Cathrine Wambach (chair), LeAnn Alstadt, (George Green for) Gail Dubrow, April Knutson, James Leger, Richard McCormick, Robert McMaster, Claudia Neuhauser, Peh Ng, Jane Phillips, Paul Siliciano, Molly Tolzmann
- Absent: William Bart, John Kieffer, Emily Ronning, Donna Spannaus-Martin, Douglas Wangenstein, Joel Weinsheimer, David Zeller
- Guests: Professors Will Durfee, Laura Gurak, Thomas Reynolds, Ms. Pamela Flash (Writing Board); Tina Falkner (Office of the Registrar)

[In these minutes: (1) writing studies; (2) policy review]

**1. Writing Studies**

Professor Wambach convened the meeting at 1:30 and turned to Vice Provost McMaster to begin a discussion of writing studies.

Vice Provost McMaster noted that there was a strategic-positioning report that made a number of recommendations about writing, including establishment of a Department of Writing Studies. The department was created and Professor Gurak is chair; faculty and staff came from English, Rhetoric and General College. New writing courses have also been created, 1201, 1301, and 1401 (with 1201 for students who need more practice learning to write at the college level, 1301 for the majority of students, and 1401 for students who are prepared to learn more advanced composition skills), and they are in the process of refining the models to allocate students to the appropriate class.

Another important issue that the Committee needs to address is whether students who receive certain scores on the Advanced Placement (AP) writing tests should be exempt from the first year writing courses. Scores on two of the AP examinations, the English Literature and Composition examination and the AP English Language and Composition examination have been used to grant exemptions. Vice Provost McMaster provided to the Committee copies of a report from Professors Gurak and Reynolds and CLA Associate Dean Teraoka recommending that the University no longer allow use of the English Literature and Composition examination to grant credit to students for the first-year writing program because "it does not adequately reflect the approach to first-year writing at the University." They also recommended that students receive credit for first-year writing only if they receive a 4 or a 5 on the English Language and Composition test (instead of 3, 4, and 5), because those who score a 3 "are not adequately prepared for writing in advanced-level college courses." Even students who obtain a 4 or 5 should be invited to enroll in an advanced writing course, perhaps 1401, because they would also benefit

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\* 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.

from writing instruction. Dr. McMaster said he hoped the Committee could make a recommendation that could be taken to the Faculty Senate for action.

Dr. McMaster then briefly reviewed the Writing-Enriched Curriculum proposal, the new model for undergraduate writing instruction, as the University contemplates evolving away from writing-intensive classes. In the new model, departments build a structure of writing in the major; the idea is that writing will have more coherence than it would with writing-intensive courses scattered through a student's curriculum. Related to this change is the creation of the Campus Writing Board, which has a mission similar to that of the Council on Liberal Education: to approve writing-intensive (until the new model is implemented) and then the writing-enriched curriculum proposals, known as Undergraduate Writing Plans. At present the Writing Board is a subcommittee of the Council but he may bring a proposal to separate it from the Council.

Professor Reynolds next reported on the status of first-year writing. All students who are not exempt from first year writing are referred to one of the three writing courses by the admissions office. Referrals are based on their high-school English grades and their ACT scores. The levels of scores used to determine a student's placement were set by the Department of Writing Studies. Most ended up in 1301, University Writing, as expected, and only small numbers of students were referred to 1201 and 1401. The courses are similar to the earlier composition courses but they have tried to collect the best practices from the previous programs, and the courses are based on the assumption that some students need more help than others. Students who are in need of more practice will take 1201 and then 1301, a full year of writing instruction. For students who test into 1301, it will be one course for one semester; if they pass, they are done with the writing requirement. The courses place more emphasis on research writing than in the past, inasmuch as this is a research university.

How will they know students are learning the same in all 170+ sections? The sections will be taught by 4-5 regular faculty, P&A staff, and graduate students, and they will ask all teachers to teach to the same outcomes (copies of which were provided to the Committee). The classes will be small (1301 sections will be 24 students).

Professor Reynolds also reported that large numbers of students are not taking composition because the number receiving a score of 3 or more on the AP test has increased. They are asking the Committee to raise the requirement to a 4 or 5 to receive credit for writing, which is more in line with what the University's peer institutions in the CIC do. Using the 3 to give credit is current University policy, so this would be a departure from that practice, Professor Reynolds said, and would mean about 300 more students would need to take writing.

In response to a question from Ms. Phillips, Professor Reynolds said the recommendation for the change is not data-driven; it is based on anecdotal information that students with a 3 do not do as well as those who have earned a 4 or 5. They are relying on the sense of the instructors, who are seeing a wide range of backgrounds and habits from students who have received a 3; it appears that the scores of 4 and 5 represent more rigorous work. Professor McCormick said that from his experience in CLA Honors, he suspects the University accepted the 3 because it made it more competitive. The private colleges do not accept AP test scores to waive requirements so parents would bring students to the University where their son or daughter would receive credit for the score. The University is now inundated with applications and does not need the competitive advantage. He suggested that over the next year the University revisit all of the AP credits. Professor Reynolds agreed that the freshman profile has changed so much that it is time to reconsider the AP writing score.

Professor Leger asked if the Committee could be provided data about the students who receive a 3 on the AP English test and who take 1301? Professor Wambach predicted that relatively few exempted students would take first year writing, but there may be many exempted students who take mathematics courses such as calculus where students expect the gap between what is expected in high school and what is expected in college to be large. Professor Leger said he would like to see data for both writing and math.

Dean Green observed that students who took composition at a MNSCU school and who transfer to the University come in with their requirements completed with their requirements satisfied, by agreement with MNSCU. The University does not question whether these students are well-equipped to do college-level writing. Nor can it challenge the transfer curriculum because of political and social pressure to allow a painless transfer for students. But this practice has not been reviewed for 10 years. There were courses created when the transfer agreement was made but it is not clear they are subject to continuing scrutiny. The only approach that will answer these questions is data collection, including identification of students who received their writing instruction in courses at other institutions, look at their records, and see if there is a need to revisit the transfer curriculum. The University does not want to accept students with poor writing skills and give them credit for having completed the writing requirement because that does not serve the students well. This cannot be an anecdotal approach, he concluded.

Professor Wambach said there will also need to be an evaluation of whether the new first year writing curriculum works. Professor Gurak commented that they brought three freshman-writing programs into one and that the task-force goal was clear: teach freshmen to write. The move is in keeping with the actions of the University's peer institutions. It will also take a couple of years to implement the recommendation about AP courses because there are now juniors and seniors in high school who are taking the courses and who will enter the University under the current policy.

Ms. Alstadt asked what happens to students who receive a 3 on the AP test and do very well on the ACT writing test. That could depend on their English grades in high school, Professor Reynolds said. It is not likely they would be passed out of writing but might end up in 1401. In the past, those students would have been passed out of writing, but the task force report was clear that they should not be.

The Committee voted unanimously to recommend to the Faculty Senate that (1) the campus no longer use the AP English Literature and Composition examination to allow students to test out of writing, and (2) only students who receive a 4 or a 5 on the AP English Language and Composition test be passed out of writing.

Ms. Phillips inquired what freshman composition would do that need not any longer be incorporated in freshmen seminars, such as visiting the library. Professor Reynolds said that students in writing classes would be exposed to library indices and so on, but reminded the Committee that one-half of freshmen take writing the second semester, so it is helpful to retain these kinds of activities in freshmen seminars. Professor McCormick observed that most freshman seminars are introductions to discipline-specific literatures; Professor Reynolds said the writing classes will expose students to the broader range of academic indices, Lexis-Nexis, and so on.

Ms. Flash explained that linking first-year writing to writing in the disciplines is a goal. They can be taught separately but then students are not ready to apply what they learn, so they work to bridge

writing to the disciplines. This link is just one of the reasons behind the launch of the Writing-Enriched Curriculum project. Another is the slowed success of the writing-intensive initiative. She reviewed the history of writing initiatives at the University, noting that the University was both more ambitious in its program and had lighter goals than peer institutions when it required four writing-intensive courses (more ambitious in requiring more courses, lighter in that the students were only asked to do 10-15 pages of writing—other institutions require more—and, elsewhere, class caps are set at 20-25 students and only regular faculty could teach such courses). The Howe Committee found that a number of students were not writing in their disciplines so recommended the four writing-intensive courses. Writing next became the subject of a lot of discussion when the strategic-positioning task force issued its report. What the task force found was that the writing-intensive courses had done a good job but that writing was not adequately infused in the curriculum; it was not always clear to faculty or students how writing was integrated; they were seen as a scattershot approach. So the task force concluded writing should be more infused in the curriculum and the campus should evolve from writing-intensive courses to the writing-enriched curriculum.

For the writing-enriched curriculum to work, faculty must be brought into the process, Ms. Flash said, and they must decide what writing abilities they want students to graduate with. The University submitted a proposal to the Bush Foundation, which funded it at a level of about \$1 million, so 22 units over the next three years will develop undergraduate Writing Plans. Most of the funds will be used for course-releases for faculty to serve as liaisons, to develop writing plans, and to make the process meaningful to the unit's faculty and students. The faculty will decide how to implement the plan and what is needed to make it work. The notion is that units will develop writing plans, implement them, and then assess and revise them. There is a structured process by which this will occur. Departmental piloting has been underway since spring, 2007, and currently nine units are engaged in the process. It is assumed these units will be able to help others in the future. The plans are very different but the faculty in each unit are articulating what makes for good writing in their discipline.

Dean Green commented that each discipline or unit has models, customs, and traditions that are not challenged by this process. The process could perhaps be enriched by units learning from other disciplines, because this model does not break out of disciplinary traditions. That is why they are asking for assessment after one year, Ms. Flash said, because many departments are more interdisciplinary than they were in the past and they discuss all the courses in the discipline, not just those in the major. Dr. McMaster said they hope that departments will reflect on what they are doing and perhaps rethink what they do. At the end of the three years, there will be a diversity of models from the 22 departments. There will also be multiple assessments, Ms. Flash said, including by the Bush Foundation and the faculty liaisons. Transforming writing affects course sequences and can lead to a more general review of the curriculum.

Ms. Phillips said this sounds very good but in some disciplines few courses are sequenced and 40% of majors are from outside the University; how will a unit build the writing-enriched curriculum if students take courses in different patterns? Ms. Flash responded that Writing Plans pertain to all courses offered by its authorizing unit, and part of the process involves faculty members in mapping possible developmental patterns that are accurate for the specific unit.

Professor Durfee reported that his department realized, as it told students to do reports and steered them to peer-reviewed articles and then asked employers about writing requirements, that the two were very different. The Campus Writing Board, which he chairs, is a body of faculty and staff concerned with all things related to undergraduate writing on the Twin Cities campus (the Committee was provided the

list of members). The Board was given seven charges by Vice Provost McMaster, including approving writing-enriched curriculum plans and writing-intensive courses, providing guidance on policy changes in writing that go to this Committee, and thinking about how to integrate the Student Learning Objectives into writing. The Board meets monthly (there are several hundred writing-intensive courses on the campus and the Board spent 65 minutes on one, so they need to develop a new approach).

Dr. Falkner asked if there is a reason there are no students on the Writing Board. Graduate students in some disciplines could provide interesting insights. Professor Durfee said he can bring that question to Dr. McMaster. At present the Board is an ad hoc subcommittee of the Council on Liberal Education; in the fall the Committee will talk about how to constitute it permanently and could discuss who should be on it.

Professor Wambach thanked the guests for joining the meeting.

## **2. Policy Review**

The Committee returned to the review of policies. Professor Wambach reported that they are being distributed to several groups for comment. The Faculty Consultative Committee, for example, has identified several areas of concern and the discussions with FCC turned out to be quite productive.

The Committee looked first at the policy "Use of Personal Electronic Devices in the Classroom," which provides that instructors have the authority to restrict or prohibit the use of personal electronic devices in the classroom. (This includes, for example, using cell phones to record, or other means of recording class sessions.) A question FCC raised was where the burden of the statement lies: should students assume electronic devices are prohibited unless there is an explicit statement by the instructor permitting them, or should students assume they are permitted unless the instructor makes a statement restricting or prohibiting their use?

Professor McCormick said that students should not assume they are allowed unless the instructor explicitly permits them. Dean Green agreed that should be the default because faculty assume use of electronic devices will not happen without permission so most say nothing on the subject in their syllabi. If the default is the other way, faculty must be educated to put something in their syllabi—and there could be a lot of angry faculty who are caught unaware. Professor Ng also agreed, and said in small classes there is often student discussion, and she prefers that students be required to ask permission so that other students can be informed. Ms. Phillips took a different view, saying that with all the ways that students can record, if the default position is that they cannot do so without permission, some will do so anyway and the policy would turn all students into criminals with a law that can't be enforced. Ms. Tolzmann said she had no idea there would be anything wrong with audio recordings.

Some of the concern, Dr. Falkner said, is about students taking pictures of examinations.

Ms. Alstadt said she could understand there could be copyright issues, but in terms of audio recordings, it is not clear how students would find out about any restrictions unless they are included in the syllabus.

Professor Leger said he also supported the default position suggested by Professor McCormick but wondered about students who use laptops to take notes. Professor McCormick said that question has arisen before because faculty get annoyed with students looking at their laptops to surf the web, not take

notes, and because of a concern with cheating. He also agreed with Professor Ng's point about interactive classes; the content is not just that of the instructor and recordings could inhibit participation by other students.

The Committee also considered the policy on retention of gradebooks or their equivalent. The current policy calls for retaining them for five years; FCC suggested one year. Dean Green urged it be two years, because students do sometimes come back more than a year later.

It was agreed that the Committee would inquire of the Records and Information Management office what the applicable University's policies are with respect to gradebooks and student papers/projects.

Next the Committee took up the Syllabus Requirements and Guidelines policy, which requires that each course have a syllabus. Professor Wambach reported that FCC had asked what a syllabus is and whether it must be on paper. A draft amendment to the policy was prepared in response to the FCC discussion: "For the purposes of this policy, a syllabus contains an outline or a summary of the course and other information students need to know in order successfully to complete the work of the course, information the instructor must communicate to the students. A syllabus may be delivered on paper or electronically (but it must be written) and is not necessarily one document."

Does this mean the requirements could be scattered all over a website, Professor McCormick asked? Ms. Alstadt said she likes to receive a paper syllabus the first day of class because she uses it as a handbook for the course. Ms. Tolzmann said it is a lot more trouble for an instructor to upload separate documents and that cannot be more difficult than cutting and pasting something together. Dean Green suggested elements of a syllabus could be linked on a master page. Professor McCormick said that as long as a student could go to one place for all assignments and course requirements, that would be acceptable, and more student-friendly. Professor Leger agreed and said that if elements of a syllabus are scattered, students could too easily miss something. Ms. Alstadt said she felt strongly that if it is online, it should use the word "syllabus" because that is to cover all elements of a course. There needs to be one central document; it is vital for students to have all the information they need.

The syllabus policy already requires that the language describing grades be included; the Committee suggested it be amended to require the definitions only in courses with undergraduates.

Professor Wambach adjourned the meeting at 3:30.

-- Gary Engstrand