

Minutes*

Senate Committee on Educational Policy
Wednesday, December 14, 2005
2:30 – 4:30
238A Morrill Hall

Present: Richard McCormick (chair), William Bart, LeAnn Dean, James Leger, Eric Ling, Claudia Neuhauser, Mary Ellen Shaw, Paul Siliciano, Craig Swan, Douglas Wangenstein, Joel Weinsheimer

Absent: Vernon Cardwell, Shawn Curley, Gail Dubrow, Josh Feneis, Christopher Pappas, Donna Spannaus-Martin, Sara Tuttle

Guests: Senior Vice President Robert Jones; Steve Fitzgerald (Office of Classroom Management)

Other: none

[In these minutes: (1) Discussion with Senior Vice President Jones; (2) update on classrooms; (3) task force reports and charges; (4) evaluation of teaching]

1. Discussion with Senior Vice President Jones

Professor McCormick convened the meeting at 2:30 and welcomed Senior Vice President Jones. He asked for a motion to close the meeting, which was made, seconded, and voted unanimously.

Senior Vice President Jones discussed with the Committee various aspects of higher education in Rochester. He concluded the discussion by saying he would like to return to the Committee later in spring semester as events proceed.

2. Classrooms

Professor McCormick now welcomed Mr. Fitzgerald to provide an update on classrooms. [Note: unless otherwise indicated, the term classrooms in these minutes will refer to centrally-scheduled classrooms, the facilities for which Mr. Fitzgerald's office is responsible.]

Mr. Fitzgerald began by noting that this Committee has historically been a tremendous supporter of central classrooms and efforts to improve teaching and learning on the Twin Cities campus. He highlighted the Committee's support in three critical areas: technology in central classrooms, scheduling and utilization of classrooms, and financial support. In all three areas there are positive things to report. Mr. Fitzgerald said his purpose today was to provide a feedback/status report to the Committee and to listen to any concerns or questions from members.

* 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.

Before his office was established (Office of Classroom Management, hereinafter OCM), there was little technology in central classrooms or support for these classrooms. Now there are central classroom technology standards in place that were developed in close consultation with faculty and instructional staff. This "Projection Capable Classroom" standard was strongly supported by SCEP (and other governance committees) and implemented in the Central Classroom Technology Upgrade plan. As of the start of the Fall 05 semester, 78% of UMTC centrally-scheduled classrooms meet the standard. The University has come a long way; the Big Ten space management group now ranks Minnesota #1 in the percentage of central classrooms with projection technology.

OCM is responsible for 287 classrooms, and 221 of these are now tech equipped. Positive feedback from students and faculty regarding the Projection Capable tech system has led a number of departments to purchase the same standard equipment from OCM's Classroom Tech Services ISO for use in their departmental spaces. As a result, there are now about 400 classroom, meeting, or conference rooms on the UMTC campus in which faculty can consistently find the same technology. This common operating protocol is easier for all users and the economies of scale in purchasing and maintenance benefit the entire campus community.

In regards to scheduling, the Minneapolis campus classrooms have improved to a 68% time utilization rate. Projected seat occupancy is 66% based on department scheduling submissions. Actual seat occupancy is 56% after the drop-add period. (The standard, and the desired goal, is 71% time utilization and 65% seat occupancy, over the 8:00 – 5:00, Monday-Friday week). Both the East Bank and the West Bank are approaching the time standard for the overall week, and both experience some classroom shortages during peak times.

Overall, this reflects a significant improvement and indicates that the Minneapolis campus is close to the standard set for classroom use. St. Paul is below standard, with a 44% time utilization rate, a 61% projected seat occupancy based on departmental scheduling submissions, and an actual seat occupancy of 46%. The data continue to show that there is more demand for classrooms than there is inventory on the east and west banks; there is insufficient demand for existing classroom inventory on the St. Paul campus.

The Committee has asked in the past about the efficiency in scheduling and utilization of classrooms, Mr. Fitzgerald recalled. There have been a number of initiatives to improve scheduling efficiency; he outlined four of them:

- Establishing an automated interface between the scheduling system and PeopleSoft, thereby eliminating "double-entry" of course scheduling requirements
- Replacing the paper-based departmental submission process with the Electronic Scheduling System (ECS)
- Empowering departments with real-time, on-demand ECS reports to identify scheduling problem areas while correction was still possible
- Providing a user-friendly version of the enterprise level scheduling system (Resource 25) to departments to give them a proven and efficient system to use in scheduling their departmental classrooms (while preserving the control of the departments over their own spaces).

The Committee has also previously discussed four problem areas that adversely impact utilization of our valuable classroom resources.

- One is projected versus actual enrollment; this trend is improving, but is still above the +/- 10% standard (20% in Fall 04, compared to 24% in each of the two previous fall semesters).
- Two is peak time/overuse of classrooms (the 60/40 rule, requiring that 40% of classes be outside peak times of 9:00 – 2:00); the trend is improving, and in the aggregate, the campus is now largely on target, although some of the larger colleges schedule more than 60% of classes during peak time while smaller colleges schedule fewer. The focus on the 9:00 – 2:00 period as peak has, however, created a bulge in the 2:30 period on Tuesday-Thursday. Mr. Fitzgerald said he would return to the Committee with a further analysis of this problem.
- Three, excess class cancellations: this has greatly improved and the rate has significantly declined (to 7% in Fall 04, compared to 23% and 17% in the preceding two fall semesters).
- Four, non-standard courses (non-standard time or day patterns); this area has not improved and continues to be problematic. In Fall 05, there were 1297 non-standard courses, an increase over Fall 04 (this does not include the numerous exceptions that are allowed under the policy, such as grad/professional courses in non peak times). Mr. Fitzgerald and Scheduling Manager Nancy Peterson will discuss this at the next Council of Undergraduate Deans meeting, and will continue to examine collaborative solutions to this ongoing problem area.

Campus-wide implementation of the Resource 25 initiative is pending (which provides electronic scheduling capability for classrooms). The system—proven and effective software—will be available to departments for departmental classrooms and will preserve department autonomy. His office is getting positive feedback; the system provides a way to measure use of department classrooms and is a helpful tool for departments.

There has been study of whether classrooms could be used (in the summer) for other kinds of non-academic events, such as conventions; one question was whether Resource 25 would help. It would. This is a pending issue, Mr. Fitzgerald told the Committee, and his office could assist in new uses of classrooms, but only if provided funding to do so and as long as the effort did not detract from the mission and resources of OCM to support academic needs in classrooms. Mr. Fitzgerald indicated that there is classroom capacity available for this convention/outreach support in the summer periods, and that teaching, learning and academic support (including necessary classroom maintenance) would take precedence.

In terms of the physical environment of classrooms, much as been done but there is still much to do, Mr. Fitzgerald said. The Facilities Condition Assessment documents the needs of central classrooms. They also use the student evaluation data (the question on the classroom physical environment) to use as a performance measure; they see the trend is improving. The data from that question are a valuable feedback mechanism.

This Committee has been helpful in supporting funding for the life-cycle needs of classrooms, Mr. Fitzgerald said; this year has been a turning point because now 58% of the recurring lifecycle requirements are funded (up from only 35% in FY 05). This increased funding level allows them to begin to plan and make targeted improvements instead of the frantic band-aid approach of the past.

Given the significant progress in achieving Tech Upgrade plan goals and the challenges of recurring lifecycle funding, OCM's emphasis on the tech side has now shifted from initial installation to sustainability of technology in classrooms. Lack of funds in the past has caused many OCM-responsible facilities issues to be deferred. With the increased level of recurring funding (to 58% of requirements), classrooms are still not fully funded. However, they hope now to begin to address these previously-deferred areas.

Committee members offered a number of comments on classrooms.

-- The technology layouts are superb. Some classrooms, however, are still atrocious (e.g., Fraser 101). Until recently, funding has not permitted OCM to do a great deal with the physical element of classrooms, Mr. Fitzgerald said; they have had to focus on technology. They acknowledge the existence of serious classroom facilities and hope to address the physical problems.

-- The OCM website works extremely well; can all rooms on campus be on the site? It is difficult to figure out who to contact when a room is not on the site. Mr. Fitzgerald discussed the recent addition of a departmental classroom scheduler viewer capability which shows that information – this is a value-added benefit of adopting R25 for departmental classrooms. He said that the Academic Health Center (which is what the question was about) has unique clinical-based scheduling requirements and treats all their classrooms as departmental classrooms. AHC has adopted the Departmental R25 system for some AHC managed rooms and these are on the website; part of the current initiative is to put them all on the website as departments allow. Mr. Fitzgerald noted that AHC was one of the pilot program early adopters of the Departmental R25 system, and the question illustrates some of the potential benefits of the initiative.

-- There should be a system that, in response to an inquiry about room availability, provides the whole range of rooms available. Mr. Fitzgerald noted that the prerequisite for such a capability is the implementation of a common database and scheduling system—precisely what the current initiative will provide.

-- Does the problem with non-standard times include labs and film courses? (It does not—the unique requirements of labs and film courses are covered by exceptions). Is there any possibility of a Monday-Wednesday schedule for some classes? Mr. Fitzgerald discussed the difference between the 50-minute "A" time Scheme and the 75-minute/TTh "B" time scheme, and indicated that there is an ongoing limited pilot program to allow 75-minute courses to go into underused periods early on MF or later on MW or WF. However, due to demand for classrooms and utilization requirements, this was a limited program, and applied only in available time periods.

-- Many times students will not sign up for classes, or will not attend, if pushed into the 8:00 slot. This does not contribute to a positive student experience. Mr. Fitzgerald said that this office has heard these same comments, but has also been told by many students that "we work" and want to get classes so they can get in early and then out to work. Some students do not like early classes, others do. In addition to these issues of preference, Mr. Fitzgerald noted that we must consider the resource and cost implications of not fully using valuable classrooms.

-- Vice Provost Swan offered several observations. The University has compared its classroom use with external efficiency standards. It could do without 8:00 or Friday classes if it had more

classrooms than it does, but that would not be very efficient. With respect to Friday classes, enrollment drops a small amount but the situation is not as bad as some media stories have portrayed it on other campuses. (Comparing Friday to other days can be a little unfair as there are no evening classes on Friday. Looking just at classes that meet before 5 pm on the Twin Cities campus, the pattern of enrollments for this fall is:

Monday	21%
Tuesday	21%
Wednesday	21%
Thursday	20%
Friday	16%
Saturday	1%
Sunday	1%)

-- OCM should find another name for Resource 25.

-- Demolition of the Science Classroom Building (in order to construct the new Science Teaching & Student Services Center) will have a big impact on classroom availability, Mr. Fitzgerald said. There are 4 auditoria and several smaller classrooms that would be taken out of the inventory, but he said that they believe they can handle it, based on the commitments of IT, CLA, College of Education, and others to be innovative and flexible in scheduling during the construction period. The campus will need to collectively and cooperatively look at a variety of other venues for classrooms (although not Northrop).

-- Ad hoc meetings of classes can be scheduled through OCM.

-- What is the technology standard that OCM is trying to achieve? Mr. Fitzgerald explained that the Tech Upgrade plan goal is to install the Projection Capable Classroom standard as the basic technological infrastructure for teaching and learning in all central classrooms. The Projection Capable Classroom standard includes a fixed data/video projector, Internet connectivity for the instructor station, wireless networking for students, smart control system with networking option, a user-friendly laptop interface, standard operating protocol familiar to UM faculty and standard input/output devices (VCR and DVD), integrated sound support system in large rooms, additional modular "add-on" capabilities (slide projectors, document cams, installed dept computers, etc.), a "Hotline" telephone for emergency support and accessibility features.

-- Has OCM given thought to putting in amplification equipment? Yes, replied Mr. Fitzgerald, they do this in new classroom installations. When they measure existing classrooms against the standards, Mr. Fitzgerald said, two primary problems appear: lighting and acoustics. They have identified the problems but have not had the money to address them; they try to do so with renovation. The classroom standards which now exist (and which are codified in Appendix DD of the UM Facilities Construction Standards) specify acoustic performance standards and identify the need to isolate classrooms from building machinery.

-- In closing, Mr. Fitzgerald thanked the Committee for its interest and its questions, noting that he viewed the periodic connection with SCEP as an important way of ensuring that OCM stays closely

attuned to the issues and needs of faculty and students. He recommended the OCM website www.classroom.umn.edu as a resource for more detailed information on all the issues discussed today.

Professor McCormick thanked Mr. Fitzgerald for providing his report.

3. Task Force Charges

Professor McCormick said the Committee needs to think about how it will approach the task force reports. The drafts will be available in mid-December, with comments due January 27. The next meeting of the Committee is January 18, which should be devoted to review of the reports. He asked that Committee members read the reports, especially those addressed to undergraduate reforms (writing, student support, and honors).

Discussion turned to the charge to the task force on small colleges.

-- The mission and deliverables are great. Sharing administrative functions makes a lot of sense and should be possible with current technology.

-- The hard part will be with the new budget model: who owns what and how do they get paid? The question of the relationship of the budget model to strategic positioning is one that arises again and again. If three units share a function, do they just share the bill? Will the system allow for that? And not all colleges using a function will necessarily be the same size.

Attention then was turned to the task force on CLA.

-- The recommendation to cultivate intellectual and analytical inquiry skills is reasonable, but these are not the same skills in verbal and visual/spatial learning. The way these skills are manifested varies with the materials. Critical literacy of visual media is an important part of what students should learn.

-- One Committee member argued that CLA should have a serious problem with schizophrenia: it is the largest college, with the largest number of students, and is also the general education college. It has to come to grips with that situation. Composition is the typical course in the college, not a graduate course in Political Science or any other field. CLA wants to benefit financially from general education courses, to earn as much as it can from them, and to provide as good a service as it can, but it is still suspicious of general education courses. They are seen as remedial, or verging on it. It may be that the University wants to be one of the top three public research universities in the world, but one has a sense that the Rochester model is the wave of the future and where the University may be heading: more applied, more technical, and more advanced courses, with general education courses sent to MNSCU. If that is so, the writing is on the wall and CLA is an outdated college. With Composition the largest program, that is a sign of weakness. Some in the college could have the sneaking suspicion that some of its major departments are superannuated. Implications for lower-division courses are similar: they could be seen as expendable and taught more effectively elsewhere. One recent President thought the University should be an upper division and graduate institution. (That is the German model, which German universities are moving away from.) Another Committee member strongly disagreed, saying that undergraduate courses are of value to research faculty and they

bring something to students that other institutions cannot. Part of the education at the University is being taught by research faculty, and that should not go away.

-- One issue is the permanence of learning. There is tremendous learning loss in general education courses; in others there is more longevity. It is important to identify the properties of courses with longevity of learning and apply them to courses that do not have such longevity. It is a shame to have students work hard in a class and not remember anything about it.

-- If a student wants to learn, he or she will study hard and will learn; if students have no interest in the course, they will not.

-- There was discussion of what can be expected from students; perhaps more can be expected for students coming into a top-three university. It may also be that general education cannot be delivered at the level expected because of what students come in with from the high schools.

-- It is difficult to believe the University could be among the top three if it farms out general education. If one thinks about the premier public research universities in the country, they have not done so.

4. Teaching Evaluation

Professor McCormick said he would share the latest version of the student-release questions. The Student Senate is happy with the work that Professor Rodriguez did; the questions now need to be piloted.

In terms of the disposition of written comments, the view of this Committee (that the disposition should be decided by each college or campus) prevailed in the straw vote at the Senate meeting. More interesting, however, was the demonstration of dissatisfaction with the questions on the current form. It is possible that everything could be opened up.

The Committee was of the view that the current effort should be completed but that there should also be review of the research on evaluation and new questions developed—and that it need not take a long time to develop them. Professor Bart suggested that someone with access to the data for the current questions should do a factor analysis and determine how the items cluster. It may be that the four questions tap the same trait.

Professor McCormick adjourned the meeting at 4:45.

-- Gary Engstrand

University of Minnesota