

Minutes*

Senate Committee on Educational Policy
Friday, September 23, 1994
2:30 - 3:30
Room 406 Campus Club

Present: Kenneth Heller (chair), Anita Cholewa, Darwin Hendel, Sara Hornstra, Manuel Kaplan, Ryan Nilsen, William Van Essendelft, Darren Walhof, Gayle Graham Yates

Regrets: Rachel Brand, James Cotter, Elayne Donahue, Laura Koch, Judith Martin

Absent: none

Guests: none

Others: none

[In these minutes: Critical measures]

Professor Heller convened the meeting at 2:30 and noted that the purpose of the specially-called session was to discuss the revised critical measures and benchmarks to be acted on by the Regents in October. He then turned the discussion over to Dr. Darwin Hendel.

The Committee saw the critical measures last year, Dr. Hendel reminded Committee members, and pointed out that Professor Heller is also a member of the strategic planning committee, which discusses broader issues of planning. He described the context and current status of the critical measures; at the institutional level, 18 measures were developed, of which five are to be implemented immediately, eight during the coming year, and five for longer-term development and implementation. The five to be implemented this year, the subject of discussion at this meeting, are: characteristics of incoming students, graduation rate, underrepresented groups and diversity, sponsored funding, and direct instructional expenditures per student. The materials for each measure are largely complete, although a few gaps remain; SCEP may be able to help with them, he concluded.

Committee members turned their attention to the materials and the measures. A number of points were made:

- One missing element, in the characteristics of incoming students, is intent. The supposition is that students in the upper quartile of their high school class intend to graduate within four or five years--but that may or may not be true. Students may define success in ways different from these measures. Can such information be obtained? Survey data from entering freshmen could be used, Dr. Hendel replied, as could data from testing for admission (e.g., ACT); he agreed that the assumption about students may be unwarranted. He reported that the last survey data from entering

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Twin Cities freshmen, nearly 90% said they expected to finish within four years. Intention can be measured, but it has to be taken with a certain amount of skepticism. He also recalled that U2000 envisions different groups of students, some regular day school students and some University College students.

The proposal being made, it was said, is to follow up on measures of intent, to learn what changes in student intent occur.

Both measures of entering students are based on high school performance; what of students who wait to enter, or who are transfer students? The measures need to be expanded to include these other students, Dr. Hendel agreed.

The measures have to be used by the University, and are imposed as a result of outside demands, but they do not reflect the fundamental educational purpose of this University, and this Committee should say so. Dr. Hendel noted that high school performance is the single best predictor of success in college, particularly first-year performance, but it is not perfect. Combined with admissions tests, it is slightly better. If there are better predictors, they have not been discovered. Retention is also a factor.

Overall, these measures are acceptable; they are intended to demonstrate that the University is doing what it should be. In terms of students, however, it is unwise to lump freshmen with transfer students, because they are two very different groups of students. Dr. Hendel noted that the vast majority of freshmen are 18 - 19 years old. In terms of transfer students, two pieces of information are available: their transfer GPA and number of credits; their high school performance is not recorded, so a different prediction measure must be used.

Dr. Hendel invited suggestions about measures that could be used for transfer students. Incoming GPA is known, and its usefulness is dependent on the institution in which it was earned. Colleges use the GPAs in different ways, and there has been little study of the relationship between transfer GPAs and success at the University. One suggestion was that reputation of the school the student transfers from would be a predictor; is that true, asked another? There has been some work done, Dr. Hendel said, and differences in student performance noted. This raises the question about what the University's policies with respect to transfer students should be. Data are also needed--where the transfer students come from and how well they do, as well as the reasons for the transfer. Preparation for work at the University should also be considered.

The topic of transfer students should perhaps be the subject of future discussion with SCEP, at which time the available data should also be presented.

The goal with respect to incoming students, in terms of likelihood of success, is that 80% of entering freshmen come from the top quartile of their high school classes. The goals should be identified at the very beginning of the material. Dr. Hendel reported that two-page summaries of each measure will be prepared.

4200 freshmen are being projected for the year 2000; at present it is between 4000 and 4100.

There is no goal about the percentage of students who should be in General College. The distribution among the colleges is not part of these measures, Dr. Hendel said, although the approximate distribution is expected to be about the same as it is now.

Earlier versions of these measures focused almost exclusively on the Twin Cities campus; they now include the other campuses, with some of the measures adapted for their needs.

- The second proposed measure is graduation rate. Graduation rate is not a good measure of much, except the expectations of society, it was said. It is not a measure of quality of students. It is, said another, a measure of efficiency of the institution, relative to other institutions, and cannot be dismissed. If the University is the kind of institution it thinks it is, it should do better on graduation rates; it either needs to decide why it isn't working or it should redesign itself.

If one looks are barriers to graduation, and the University can do something about them, then it should. The measure is acceptable in that sense. The measure cannot be used by itself, Dr. Hendel agreed, and must be related to obstacles as well as student characteristics.

Some may object that a 50% graduation rate in five years for incoming freshmen is not very lofty. The numbers include General College. Are there students transferring from the University to other institutions and graduating? The focus of this measure is graduation rates at the University, Dr. Hendel said; students who transfer out are not included in the discussions; there is no good way to know if such students transfer or drop out. Eventually there will be a data base for students who transfer among Minnesota institutions.

Achieving this goal will be a stretch, Dr. Hendel observed; at present the difference between the five-year graduation rate (38%) and the rate of graduation represented by the eight-year graduation rate (51%) is only 13%. These are not new statistics; the goal will require that the University be more focused on retention and graduation than it has before. It can only change the things over which it has control. Is it realistic to set such a goal? It is achievable, Dr. Hendel said, although it will be a challenge. All of these goals need to be re-examined periodically; the research suggests setting goals that can be achieved but that will take work to do so.

If one reason students do not graduate in a timely fashion is because they get poor or no advising or because of course scheduling? Do we need better assurances that necessary courses are offered when they are needed? The data, it was said, do not support the supposition that these are major problems; only 54% of students graduate EVER. Of the half who graduate, 38% graduate in five years--or about 75% of those who graduate do so in five years. There are really two measures needed. The percentage of entering freshmen who graduate at all and the time it takes to graduate. Each probably has different causes. To lump them together is to confuse the issue.

Committee members discussed this measure further. Dr. Hendel pointed out that looking at an outcome such as graduation rates does nothing except report information. What must be considered is who is admitted and whether or not they have the right experience, the latter of which consists of many pieces (including advising and course access). If the University does not provide what it says is necessary to success, will the student be eager to come back to the University? The factors that affect student success need to be monitored more closely than they have in the past.

One Committee member commented on experiences with students getting courses and the advising they receive about the number of credits they should take (e.g., they should enroll for only 12 credits, rather than 15, which makes graduation in four years impossible). Departments should be told, or have as policy, that necessary courses must be offered and that students should enroll for 15 credits. The Committee needs a policy discussion about how departments treat students on the way to graduation; others agreed. Dr. Hendel commented that if such treatment is not considered, achievement of the goals will be difficult.

What must be learned, it was said, is why students leave; the ones who stay are generally not really the problem, because about 75% graduate in five years. The University has occasionally conducted such studies, although one has not been done recently, and the information they contained has not been seen as a major agenda item for the institution; the University has not attended to retention rates in the past. The difference, it was said, is in part between an open-door institution and a highly-selective institution; the former will have lower retention rates, and the University has in the past been more accessible.

An important piece of information to learn would be the percentage of students who leave the University but who graduate elsewhere. It may be bad news, if one learns why they left, but it would be good news in that students had benefited from the University sufficiently to get started toward a degree.

Part of this is also a policy question about how many people are admitted in the first place; if the University becomes more selective, one would expect a higher percentage of its students to graduate. The University may become less accessible, but will concentrate on supporting to graduation those students it admits. The University could remain relatively accessible, it was also said, and students better supported--although graduation rates would likely then remain lower, it was pointed out. One could say that if the graduation rate is high, then the University is not accessible enough and should be admitting more students, at some point reaching an appropriate balance between graduation rate and access.

The means to accomplish these goals has to be identified, it was said. Dr. Hendel agreed and noted that related actions need to be more specifically set forth, including who will have what responsibilities. There will be, for example, periodic newsletters about the progress of the entering class of 1994, including how well they are doing as well as those who dropped out and those who did not.

-- The third measure speaks to underrepresented groups and diversity (with respect to both incoming undergraduate and graduate and professional students as well as faculty and staff).

About 18.5% of the current entering freshmen class is designated as belonging to underrepresented groups; in the year 2000 that will drop to 16.2%, with a decrease in the Asian-American group and an increase in the African-American group. It is surprising to see the decrease in the Asian-American group. None of the numbers are minima or maxima, Dr. Hendel said; any student who meets admissions criteria will be admitted. The numbers are based on projections of the number of high school graduates in the metropolitan area; those numbers suggest there will be decreases in the numbers of Asian-Americans and an increase in the number of African-Americans. The change in

the percentage is nonetheless surprising, it was said, given the number of predicted Asian-American high school graduates in the metropolitan area.

The system reacted to the goal of having a 10% enrollment of students of color by admitting relatively large percentage of students, some of whom may not have had the potential to graduate from the University. This goal calls for a focus on the admissions process, perhaps reducing the number of students of color in some groups--while at the same time increasing the number of those students who graduate. Each of the presidential minority advisory committees have been consulted throughout the process of development of these measures, Dr. Hendel added.

What happened to women, asked one Committee member? Nothing is said about the fields in which they are severely underrepresented, such as IT; there appear to be no initiatives or goals with respect to women. Dr. Hendel responded that they are included in several categories. Unlike other underrepresented groups, no specific action seems to be recommended, it was said.

There are no provisions for increasing underrepresented groups in particular colleges, it was noted; are there specific initiatives on this point? Those will be set out in college planning documents, replied Dr. Hendel; these are institutional measures. There is general language about increasing representation, but nothing addresses women in any specific way, it was said, and the document needs to be fixed in that respect.

Why is the goal for General College for underrepresented groups much higher than for the University as a whole? Dr. Hendel said it is related to issues of preparedness and the differences among groups in that respect. The reality is that of students who graduate from high school and not well prepared for the University, a higher percentage of them are students of color. The intent is to make sure that students of color who are not well prepared DO have an opportunity to enter the University. This appears to be "ghettoization"; although there needs to be a unit that helps under-prepared students, one needs an overall goal for the University. The needs of under-prepared students will then be served. This may be less a goal than an approximation of what the numbers will be, Dr. Hendel said. It was also pointed out that General College is not now successful in serving under-prepared students. Only about 10% of General College students ever graduate. This is a glaring failure on the University's part.

There are no specific initiatives for people with disabilities, Dr. Hendel said, but that is a part of the focus on underrepresented groups. It is unlikely numeric goals will be established, but there will be goals about serving well people who have disabilities.

One of goals of the University is to serve those students who, for cultural, social, and familial reasons, may not be well prepared, and it tries to do so through the General College. It is not there to serve those who were lazy. It may be better to refer to students whose background did not promote success.

It might be useful to keep statistics for students of color separate for General College and the whole University; if 90% of students of color end up in General College, the overall goal of the University has not really been met, in intent. One cannot graduate from General College, it was noted; the problem is that too few people who enter General College transfer later to other colleges,

and one might suggest the effort is a failure.

In terms of women, even though the percentage of students is only three or four percentage points below their numbers in the population at large, that is a very large number of people. The percentages of students of color may be large, but the absolute numbers of people are much smaller than the number of women. It is unacceptable to say that women are not underrepresented, at 48% of the students, given the numbers of people involved. And the problem is much larger when one looks at specific colleges.

- The fourth measure is sponsored funding, by campus. The Senate Committee on Research is discussing this item; one of their concerns is that while sponsored funding is important to track, it should not be assumed that it is equally important everywhere on campus. In addition, attention must be given to different types of sponsored research. This is a very global measure; it must be looked at carefully at collegiate levels, and it is not intended that the global measure be used the same way by all campuses and departments.

Are the data about federal funding a prediction or a goal? A combination of the two, Dr. Hendel said; they are based in part on what is realistic, given the funding scene. If a steady state can be achieved, the University should be reasonably pleased. A goal lower than the University's recent performance seemed unusual.

These numbers suggest there will be no major University research initiatives in the near future, it was said. The only way to increase the University's ranking in sponsored research funds would require a major new effort in one or more areas. This says the University will not go after huge projects, but it does call for the University to keep research funding steady--which may be very difficult to do.

- The fifth measure, instructional direct expenditures, is different from the other measures; it looks at funding for instruction. It is present to remind everyone that the University cannot achieve what it intends in other areas if it does not have the necessary financial resources. This is intended to be one such measure: How the University compares to peer institutions in its funding for direct instructional expenses. Analysis suggests the funding is below average; the goal is fairly modest--to increase that funding so that it is 2% above average by the year 2000 (at present it is several percentage points below average). In a way, the measure is intended as a reality check.

As direct instructional expenditures increase, Dr. Hendel said, there should be increases in the quality of the student experience related to instructional expenditures (e.g., course access). The measure does not consider efficiency in the allocation of resources. He agreed that even the long-term developments do not constitute true measures of educational quality; until those measures are developed, one has no real measure of the quality of the University. What is missing is the goal of measuring educational quality. Dr. Hendel agreed that this is only a placeholder; it would be helpful to talk to SCEP about the definition of educational quality and the implications for how it might be measured, and soon. These are central questions, but not easy to quantify.

This whole process has been engaging and exciting, Dr. Hendel commented, and some of the measures have been around for a long time but have not received very much University attention. The

process is identifying measures that the University must pay attention to; that is positive, but it must be certain that it is paying attention to the right things.

The process is not finished. These five items need additional work, based on conversations such as these; there are major pieces that need attention. Additional measures also need to be developed. One must also be careful not to get carried away; one could devise a system that consumes 90% of everyone's time!

These issues will return to the Committee, it was noted. Hearing no other comments, Professor Heller thanked Dr. Hendel and adjourned the meeting at 3:45.

-- Gary Engstrand

University of Minnesota