

Minutes*

Faculty Consultative Committee
Thursday, February 28, 2002
1:15 – 3:00
223 Johnston Hall

- Present: Joseph Massey (chair), Wilbert Ahern, Arthur Erdman, Daniel Feeney, Marti Hope Gonzales, Marc Jenkins, Candace Kruttschnitt, Leonard Kuhl, Judith Martin, Paula Rabinowitz, Charles Speaks
- Absent: Muriel Bebeau, Susan Brorson, Les Drewes, Richard Goldstein, Scott McConnell, Jeff Ratliff-Crain
- Guests: Dean Steven Rosenstone, Executive Vice President Robert Bruininks

[In these minutes: The Intellectual Future of the University: The Idea of a University]

This meeting was one of the occasional FCC meetings devoted to the intellectual future of the University. This one focused on a paper prepared by Dean Steven Rosenstone, College of Liberal Arts, on "The Idea of a University," presented at the University Sesquicentennial Symposium on the University's Contribution to Minnesota's Economic, Social and Cultural Vitality, April 23, 2001. (A copy of the paper can be found at <http://www.education.umn.edu/pepsc/products/Rosenstone.pdf>.) Professor Massey convened the meeting at 1:20 and turned to Dean Rosenstone for opening remarks.

Dean Rosenstone began by saying that the FCC intellectual future discussions were very important and that there should be more venues at the University for people to pause and reflect and think about what the University is and "what we want it to be."

Dean Rosenstone, alluding to his article, identified what he believed to be the "core defining characteristics, chief purposes, and primary responsibilities of a university." They are "the advancement of knowledge through basic research and creative works," "the extension of knowledge through liberal education" and "the dissemination of knowledge through publication and civic education." But over the last few decades "many public universities have shifted their priorities away from basic research and liberal education toward applied research and vocational training" and they have not done enough to "educate the public about the contributions that flow from basic research and liberal education." Instead, they have been portraying themselves "as vehicles for economic growth and workforce development."

Universities do prepare students for the world of work and they do have an enormous economic impact, of course. However, these are by-products, not the core purposes of universities. Because the message from the institutions has focused on the by-products, however, universities "have helped create confusion about and misunderstanding of" their role. Lobbying efforts, alumni magazines, web sites, and legislative proposals have created the impression that THE purpose of the university is to create jobs and economic development; little is said about basic research and the dissemination of knowledge.

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

There are disturbing trends in public universities, Dean Rosenstone said. They are shifting their priorities "away from basic research and liberal education and toward applied research and vocational training." They have de-emphasized the arts and humanities, the social, physical, and biological sciences and focused instead on professional and engineering programs. The latter have had priority in new facilities, faculty, and degree programs.

By the same token, priorities in undergraduate education have changed as well, toward the same professional programs and away from the arts, humanities, natural and social sciences, and education. Baccalaureate degrees granted in the latter fields have dropped noticeably since 1970 while degrees in engineering, business, architecture, the health professions grew substantially. Also disturbing, in an age when cross-cultural communication has become increasingly important in a global economy and a diverse country, the number of college students taking second language courses has dropped by 50% since 1960. By 2000, 40% of undergraduate degrees were in professional programs; "in short, undergraduate education in the United States has increasingly become vocational training."

There has also been a change in allocation of federal research funds; as a proportion of federal research dollars, support for the social sciences, arts, and humanities has declined by over 50% since 1973. Support for the natural sciences also declined, while support for engineering and professional programs increased.

Promotional materials from many of the nation's top public research universities "show a remarkable uniformity of message": they portray themselves as the state's economic engine. The focus is on "volume of research activity, the number of research dollars, the commercial applications, the new patents, royalty income" and the economic benefits of all these measures. The focus is on career development rather than liberal education, and virtually nothing is said about graduate education or the role of graduate students in research and teaching.

The problem in relying on making workforce and economic development the FOCUS of public understanding of what universities are about is that those become the STANDARD by which universities will be judged. If universities emphasize applied research, professional education, and vocational training rather than basic research, liberal education, and broad knowledge; it has failed to educate legislators and the public about why a liberal education matters or why "open dissemination of knowledge serves society." Instead, the University promises jobs and prosperity in return for investment in the University.

The long-term consequences of this approach is that Americans believe job-training is "one of the most important contributions of colleges and universities," parents think their children should go to college to get a good job, few have any idea what a liberal education means or why it is important. There is no understanding of basic research (which led to the discovery of the double helix of the DNA molecule, among other things). As legislators have been collectively mis-educated about universities, they will use the wrong set of benchmarks to measure them; they will not be evaluated by the quality of teaching or the scientific advances, creative works, or dissemination of knowledge, but instead by jobs, businesses, and patents. The test will be whether a dollar invested in the university is better than an investment of that dollar somewhere else--and the core purposes of the university will drop away when that standard is applied.

Art Rolnick, Senior Vice President and Director of Research for the Minneapolis Federal Reserve Bank, in a paper presented at the same Sesquicentennial conference, made a strong argument for public goods in terms of what universities do in basic research, giving away knowledge, and carrying out investigations that don't have a short-term pay-off. (The paper can be found at <http://www.education.umn.edu/pepsc/products/Rolnickrevised%20paper.pdf>.) Universities engage in basic research for which there is no market incentives--and they do not need to subsidize applied research where market incentives exist. If basic research disappears (research that is essential to applications later), society will be worse off because there is no other place the research will be done except in universities.

On the subject of liberal education, Dean Rosenstone said, his concern is not only about increased professionalization. He recently re-read the report of the Task Force on Liberal Education from the early 1990s; it was a very powerful document in terms of what it said the University wished to accomplish with undergraduates. When one compares the report to the 1200 courses a student can take to fulfill liberal education requirements, one has to ask if the University is really accomplishing what it intended. If one looks carefully at the courses, one must ask, as teachers, if they meet the test of taking students through the thinking envisioned in the report. There is room to do better, he said.

Professor Rabinowitz recalled an article in the New York Review of Books which contained a "devastating statistic" about why the universities the faculty teach at are not the same as the universities they attended. The number of students majoring in English or Math has declined precipitously; instead they major in applied fields. One result is that there are far fewer graduate students (in part because there are no jobs), and Math and English are seen only as courses that must be taken in order to get into other fields.

She said she was not sure the changes described by Dean Rosenstone are a marketing problem; they may reflect a larger economic shift in society. But trying to convince people that a liberal education is good for them, so they will be challenged, has not proven to be a good argument.

Four in ten undergraduate students are in professional programs, Dean Rosenstone recalled. Institutions make choices about their programs, buildings, what they say to alumni, legislators, and prospective parents. He surmised that a two-year content analysis of university publications would demonstrate an instrumentalist, applied emphasis, way out of proportion with what the people in the institutions themselves would say. Universities perpetuate these trends.

There is a vicious cycle, Professor Kruttschnitt said. The University must carve out a niche for itself; the small private liberal arts colleges claim they have "real professors" in the classroom (unlike the University, impliedly). The University must create a niche different from what the area colleges offer, but she agreed that the "create a great mind" argument does not persuade. That IS what the University does, but the argument does not capture attention.

Dr. Bruininks said that one of the points Mr. Rolnick made was that one of the most important contributions a university makes to a community is educated people. He said he dealt with these "core questions" many times at the legislature and tried to talk, in the vein Dean Rosenstone outlined, about values. The reaction in some cases was that there is too much four-year education and there are too many people who are getting degrees and driving cabs. Dr. Bruininks agreed that the University has a problem with its message; it needs to talk more deeply and in more moving ways--but it cannot do so in the

abstract. The University has put a lot of money into biological research, but society cannot make advances without putting money into the humanities as well so people can think about what to do with the advances in biology. He agreed, however, that there is a need for different arguments.

Professor Erdman, noting a table in Dean Rosenstone's article detailing changes in federal research support for colleges and universities by discipline from 1972 to 1999, observed, as an engineer, that even though federal support for research for engineering had gone up from 1972 to 1999, the percentage of the total is still very small and that the natural (basic) sciences still dominate federal funding.

Dean Rosenstone said he was not just making his arguments as the CLA dean; they apply as well to the sciences and other fields across the institution.

The message has to get to prospective students as well, Professor Speak said. What does one say when parents WANT their children to get a degree in a field that will get them a job, rather than in political science or English? It is difficult not to fall into instrumental language, Dean Rosenstone said, but one can take two tacks. First, a career is not the single job one gets when leaving college; if one thinks about the last two decades, there is NO WAY a university can train someone for a job that will last a career, so it must train them to think and to be able to re-invent themselves. Second, one can be ruthlessly instrumental, by citing examples of liberal arts graduates who are enormously successful. There are many examples (Dean Rosenstone cited several) of alumni who are doing exactly what parents might imagine they want their children to do.

Parents must also be informed that the major is not job training, Professor Ahern commented; it is a test of abilities and it can provide a number of career tracks. It is necessary to unlink the major and the career.

There is also little said about the value of an undergraduate being trained by a graduate student, Professor Rabinowitz said. This has to do with the excitement of being with people not all that much older than the undergraduates themselves, people who might argue with the professor, people who are doing leading research in their field. Faculty at many small, private colleges are not doing research. There needs to be a better argument for graduate education and for undergraduates being in a classroom with graduate students.

What has been the response to his paper, Professor Martin asked Dean Rosenstone? One can read in the newspaper about Senate Democrats arguing against taking money away from higher education, so SOME message is getting to the Capitol. Dean Rosenstone said he has not been out promoting the paper. As he visits departments in the college, however, some have wanted to discuss the paper. Most faculty and deans seem to be in agreement about the core principles--and that includes many professional school deans, who say that universities must carry out basic research and be good in providing a broad undergraduate education or they will not be great institutions. Some say he is not pragmatic enough, however. His worry, however, is that universities are going down a path where they will not do what students and society need.

Professor Martin said that this paper and others raises the question: "when most of us" were in college, many people did not go to college and graduate. Now a huge number at least start and what they expect from college is very different. Earlier people went to school because it was a good and valuable

thing to do; expectations have shifted. (Dr. Bruininks interjected that the numbers attending college have levelled off and may be trending slightly down.)

Professor Gonzales said that after 20 years of teaching, she is coming to feel the classroom is more and more like a high school in terms of the skills students lack. They want study guides on what to read, they want study groups, they want faculty to take more responsibility for structured activities so they can learn. This is especially true for freshmen and sophomores. That is another group that has to receive the message, Professor Speaks commented: students.

Professor Feeney said he would play the devil's advocate--and noted that he was not liberally educated. The cost of higher education relative to family income has increased (a phenomenon they must deal with in professional schools all the time because students must pay back large loans). What is the message being sent to freshmen. Are their instructors talking about "critical thinking"? Are there instances where faculty who are no longer active in research (particularly funded research) are almost forced to teaching in large lower-level courses? Are there instances where there is more contact with graduate students than faculty? If so, what kind of message those students getting either about critical thinking or about the value of a liberal education, he asked? Graduate students are often MORE committed to undergraduate education, Professor Rabinowitz rejoined. Professor Feeney said that students have to be told about the value of a liberal education.

Professor Feeney said that in the Academic Health Center they have had to cross the bridge between basic and applied/clinical research; the emphasis now is on translational research. Perhaps that is a message for the rest of the University in terms of a bridge between basic and applied undergraduate liberal education.

Dean Rosenstone agreed that when freshmen come to the University they need to have it explained to them what their experience will be about and how different it will be from high school. They need to understand what process they will go through, what it means, why it is important they be an educated person, and that they will be challenged about fundamental things they believe. If the University does not do that early, it is not carrying out its responsibilities.

Professor Kuhl agreed with Professor Martin about the change in student attitudes about education and said there is also a change in the parents. They also need to understand the value of a liberal education and that the goal of college is not to get the best job. There has been a huge cultural shift and it is not clear why this happened. The universities do not have to accept it, Dean Rosenstone replied, and agreed that they must find a way to educate parents as well.

A second issue is who students encounter in the classroom. In his department, Professor Kuhl said, they put the BEST professors in introductory courses, while the TAs do labs. Other departments do things differently. There needs to be a look at the whole University in this respect. There should be talk about whether one way is better than others, Professor Ahern added; Astronomy is giving introductory education a high value and says it is important. Many students in introductory courses are not enthusiastic about the subject and graduate students may be inexperienced in helping students to be excited. There is value in having faculty in introductory courses.

Professor Gonzales said one has to ask how receptive the audience will be to the arguments that have been discussed at this meeting. She said she was concerned about the box office success of "Forrest

Gump," which in her mind signaled a growing "anti-intellectual" sentiment in our country. She wondered whether faculty and administrators are not overconfident about their ability to influence the public, with many larger forces working against the values of higher education. She said she is becoming more and more convinced that the best higher education can do is achieve a moral victory: say what it believes, over and over, but not expect to persuade.

Professor Jenkins said the articles resonated with him and that the Academic Health Center is as guilty as other parts of the University in emphasizing applied research. Faculty who do basic research find this annoying and would like to see more promotion of basic research. Promotion of applied research is driven by financial pressures. The administration believes that basic research is less likely to influence donors, funding agencies, and state legislators to provide financial support to the University. However, both of the articles read by the Committee point out that the long term financial security and prestige of the University will derive from its true mission, that is, production of quality scholarship. Both of the articles emphasized evaluation of an institution by the quality of its scholarship, not by the amount of money raised. Such an evaluation would require a system that accurately identifies quality scholarship. Professor Jenkins asked Dean Rosenstone if he had given any thought to how to evaluate and promote quality scholarship.

Dean Rosenstone said that "we decide what will be rewarded and honored." What is put in publications and who is cited as an exemplar has ripple effects through the institution. The units can champion profound discoveries, great books, an understanding of a social problem, etc. The reward systems are in the departments as well as the college. His office asks about the quality of the impact on the discipline: has the work reshaped the way people think and the questions people ask; does it provide theoretical insight; is it work people will go back to; what has been accomplished; is it a fundamental breakthrough; does it change or create a discipline--these are all measures of quality scholarship. It is not as important to have published a lot of articles if one has published fundamental breakthroughs.

The reward structure has to recognize faculty who take risks and assume they will be honest in their efforts. Universities are protected places so faculty can do scary, risky, or out-of-the-box kinds of things. If universities are not nurturing those kinds of activities, they are not going where they are capable of being.

The faculty are willing to take a risk and do what he has talked about, Professor Speaks said. He also agreed with Dean Rosenstone. But the faculty will say it is interesting that the Dean says this, but their merit reviews will depend on the number of publications and citations. There has to be a willingness to back away from the way faculty are traditionally reviewed. Dean Rosenstone agreed; the question about faculty work is not the height of the stack, but its importance. At one institution he was at, one faculty member produced one book every ten years--but they changed disciplines. "Merit systems that count make me nervous," he said.

Professor Erdman returned to the topic of parents and students. In a sound-bite society, people do not want the details and it is difficult to brag about accomplishments in basic science research when even faculty colleagues may not understand the work that is being done. If clarity about the message is a problem, Dean Rosenstone commented, one has to go to the experts for help in delivering it. There also needs to be a balance between applied and basic research, Professor Erdman said. Development of the C-T scanner relied on decades of basic research, Dean Rosenstone observed.

Professor Rabinowitz said that she is on the board of directors of a small arts organization and helps them with writing grant proposal. Often they must emphasize education in the proposals, while their role is simply to provide artistic activities. So these organizations are supposed to educate and the University is supposed to be an economic engine. There seems to be a confusion of mission; the University does not sell itself as an educational institution but as one that makes money. Funding agencies drive the applications, Professor Jenkins agreed. It seems it is never enough simply to do research, Professor Rabinowitz added; the question is what it can do. Professor Kuhi later said he agreed with Professor Rabinowitz's observation about funding agencies. NASA and NSF support basic research, but now there must be an educational component as well, so people try to kludge up something that is largely a waste of effort.

Professor Rabinowitz said that Dean Rosenstone's vision of reviews was appealing. Everyone is on the speeded-up model and there is no time for gestation. If that message could get out, that the University is a place for people to think, that would be a great help.

This conversation is occurring at other places as well, Dr. Bruininks said. The difficulties over basic versus applied research are similar to the breakdown in political discourse. The level of civility has dropped in political institutions and institutions of higher education must be prepared to make the key arguments themselves. The universities must make the connections between basic and applied research in public terms and why universities are special places that need protection to pursue inquiry into complex and difficult subjects. And part of the problem is inside the institution: the departments that do the most "counting" for purposes of merit are usually the ones that are most faculty-driven. It is important for the University community to use its evaluation systems to protect open inquiry and support research that takes time to develop.

What would replace those approaches, Professor Kruttschnitt asked? The departments need to argue about what it is important to evaluate, Dr. Bruininks replied, and put their trust in the program directors or chairs. "WE (the faculty) must create the cultural dynamics," he said, not the Board of Regents or the administration. Renewal must come from within, with an understanding of what is taking place outside the University as well. The outside world must not be treated as the great unwashed; they can understand what a great university is about. It is also the case, he said, that the return from higher education is the highest in history, both personally and economically. People want to be sure that they are putting their money into a quality education; the faculty assure that quality through the merit review systems and other means.

If the word got out that the Provost and Dean are thinking about these reward structures in a different way, Professor Martin commented, there could be change. There needs to be a way for colleges to take these conversations seriously, Dean Rosenstone said, so they can create a culture and incentives that they want.

Professor Kuhi said he has been disappointed with the review system ever since he came to the University. He said he would repeat what he has said before: there is not enough money in raises to call it a merit system. Why not have longer periods between merit reviews and give people cost-of-living increases in between the reviews? Then there would be reviews every three or four years. The current system does not allow big projects. It also avoids the problem of publishing one's book in the wrong year--the year there were no increases.

There also needs to be rewards for people who work as members of a community; functional and highly-productive departments should receive more money, Dr. Bruininks said. These things make a difference in the quality of life for students as well.

Professor Speaks inquired why the University had not spread around the state the op-ed piece that Mr. Rolnick wrote about the University and common goods. One cannot expect people to read a paper but they do read editorials. Dean Rosenstone agreed. He said he would take issue with some of the University's communications strategies.

Professor Martin related an experience she had had at a lunch for prospective students. She told them they would be very different people when they left the University in four years. The parents of the students were horrified and ready to withdraw the registration; they were not excited about the potential for their children and what they might become. These were not immigrant families, who often do want to see changes; unlike large families, where children were left to develop and be educated, these were from normal Minnesota small families who did not want to see their child changed.

Professor Speaks asked if the allocation of resources from central administration to units, academic or otherwise, reflects a commitment to liberal education and to the concepts articulated in "The Idea of a University," and answered his own question by saying he believed they did not. He expressed doubt that the University is making a deliberate investment that will support the core programs to ensure that they survive. Heads around the table nodded in agreement.

Dean Rosenstone said this had been a tremendous conversation; the question is how to take it beyond this meeting room. If there is a sense about the core principles of universities and how to use values to inform biennial requests, what the leadership says, publications, how universities organize themselves, and identify responsibilities in the classroom, that would be a great step forward. This is the kind of conversation faculty across the University long to have, Professor Rabinowitz said; they desire something more than what the University gives. If each dean would sponsor meetings like this, that would help to circulate ideas.

What should be the mission of the Committee next year, Professor Feeney asked; what does the group wish to do collectively? This conversation provides a starting point; his sense, he said, is that the Committee should start with the deans. There is much that affects both the deans and the faculty and there is need to get away from the we-they mentality. He suggested that FCC and deans work together and develop proposals that are faculty-driven, collaborative, and ground-up rather than administration-driven. He said the Committee may wish to work more closely with the deans. Professor Speaks concurred, and recalled a small meeting of FCC members and deans that was very productive. Dean Rosenstone endorsed collaborative work between the deans and the faculty.

Professor Massey thanked Dean Rosenstone for joining the Committee.

After Dean Rosenstone left, Committee members discussed the desirability of working with the deans and the issues that should be identified. Professor Feeney said he would rely on the collective wisdom of the Committee. Professor Martin said that the Committee and deans could push for a different kind of merit system; if done with the deans, Professor Speaks added, and with their commitment, it is something that could be accomplished.

In one other matter, the Committee approved the names of two individuals to be nominated to serve on the President's Student Behavior Review Panel; Professor Massey will forward the names to the President.

Professor Massey adjourned the meeting at 3:10.

-- Gary Engstrand

University of Minnesota