

Minutes\*

**Senate Committee on Educational Policy**  
**Wednesday, September 26, 2001**  
**1:00 – 3:00**  
**510 Morrill Hall**

Present: Wilbert Ahern (chair), Shawn Curley, Christina Frazier, Gretchen Haas, Gordon Hirsch, Christine Maziar, Kathleen Newell, Marsha Odom, Karen Seashore, Mary Ellen Shaw, Mary Sue Simmons, Craig Swan

Regrets: Frank Kulacki, Carol Miller

Absent: Steve Fitzgerald, Geri Malandra, Martin Sampson

Guests: none

[In these minutes: (1) composition of the Morse-Alumni award committee; (2) civic learning subcommittee; (3) changes in degree requirements/credits required/taken for a degree; (4) joint subcommittee on teaching evaluation]

**1. Teaching Award Nominating Committee**

Professor Ahern convened the meeting at 1:05 and turned first to the question of the membership on the Morse-Alumni Award nominating committee. He recalled that there had been a motion made at the last meeting to expand the membership by two faculty members, one from the Twin Cities campus and one from the three coordinate campuses, and that the two coordinate campus representatives would rotate two-year terms so that no campus would be without representation for more than two years.

In terms of representation from Duluth, Professor Ahern said he had been informed by a past president of the bargaining unit that there would be no conflict with the contract if a faculty member were to serve on the nominating committee.

There is also a question of pattern: are there colleges that have been unsuccessful in having candidates win the awards or has the pattern of membership on the nominating committee been maldistributed? Is this worth pursuing in terms of the membership of the nominating committee? Karen Linquist in Human Resources might also be asked to look at the pattern of nominations: are some colleges not nominating as many candidates as they might?

Professor Curley inquired if the Committee actions are not premature in that they add workload (by adding faculty to the nominating committee) and create restrictions on existing practices when the Committee does not know if there has been bias in the process. Professor Seashore said that as a member of the Graduate and Professional award committee, she realized that many faculty know

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good teaching in their own discipline but do not understand the differences across disciplines; by adding two faculty to the nominating committee there is more variety because there will be a broader range of disciplines represented.

The Committee voted in favor of the proposed change in the membership of the nominating committee. It also agreed that all but the student member of the nominating committee be asked to serve another year (the student member had served for four years). It was agreed that Karen Linquist in Human Resources should be asked to incorporate this change in the guidelines.

The Committee then spent considerable time identifying faculty members who would be asked to serve on the two nominating committees. Professor Curley agreed to fill in next year for Professor Seashore on the Graduate/Professional award nominating committee.

## **2. Civic Learning Subcommittee**

The Committee turned next to a draft charge for a subcommittee on civic learning. It deliberated for some time what the charge should contain, and voted unanimously in favor of the following language.

Background: The appointment of this subcommittee is a response to the work of the Civic Engagement Task Force. In particular, it will review the recommendations from the Task Force's Civic Learning committee and working group and develop a recommendation about their implications for educational policy at the University of Minnesota.

Charge: The subcommittee will address the following tasks:

1. Identify existing civic learning opportunities at the University, looking for "best practices";
2. Consult across the colleges and campuses about the place of civic learning at the University;
3. Refine the working definition of "Civic Learning";
4. Develop guidelines for and ways of promoting civic learning;
5. Develop a plan for civic learning assessment across the University; and
6. Recommend a strategy for addressing civic learning at the undergraduate and graduate levels of the University

The Committee then identified those who might be asked to serve on the subcommittee.

## **3. Change in Degree Requirements**

Professor Ahern turned now to Vice Provost Swan for comments on changes in degree requirements.

Dr. Swan said that a report has not yet been prepared; they are in the process of reviewing degree requirements, building on the report of the subcommittee on degrees and credits chaired by Professor Hirsch last year. The subcommittee looked at what happened to degree requirements when the change to semesters occurred; it found a small amount of creep in requirements.

Dr. Zetterberg, in Institutional Research and Reporting, has also gathered data on the actual number of credits, by major, that students have when they graduate. Most majors require 120 credits; a few require 128. Many students, however, graduate with 138 or more credits, some with 160 or more. Dr. Swan said his office sent letters to the colleges last summer asking for a report on degree requirements.

The focus of the subcommittee was average number of credits to a degree, Professor Hirsch said; Dr. Zetterberg found that in comparable institutions, graduating with 135 credits was not unusual.

Is it possible to identify how often a student changes majors, Dr. Maziar asked?

The big question is whether some majors demand too much, Dr. Swan said. Some face accreditation issues; others seem just to take up a lot of the student's time.

#### **4. Joint Subcommittee on Student Evaluation of Teaching**

The Faculty Consultative Committee, at its retreat in August, asked the Committee on Faculty Affairs and this Committee to appoint a joint subcommittee to look at student evaluation of teaching. Professor Ahern said he would speak with Professor Goldstein, chair of the Faculty Affairs committee, to identify what would be done.

Professor Swan urged that strong student representation would be important if the subcommittee looks at the structure of the questions asked.

Professor Ahern said he would prefer to wait on the question of student evaluation. The Committee also needs a subcommittee on peer evaluation of teaching: how is the policy working, what has been learned, what works well? The subcommittee could survey departments on what they do and identify different practices.

Professor Seashore said that many departments are not following the policy; the more interesting question is WHY they are not. There is a policy that is not being implemented: it is important to understand what people think the policy should accomplish. The broader question is about a policy that is not implemented or is "not implementable" without a support system. One suspects there is a correlation between different cultures and differences in peer evaluation of teaching. Professor Ahern said the issue needs careful scrutiny and why the policy is not being followed; he agreed that either it is not good policy or that it should be taken more seriously.

The policy is very broadly written, Professor Hirsch noted, unlike the very prescriptive policy on student evaluation; there are many ways to conduct peer evaluation. The subcommittee should find out what is being done and then revisit the policy if appropriate, Professor Ahern said. If changes are not needed and the policy makes sense, then the subcommittee should report on ways the policy is working, and best practices, as a way to reinforce it.

How will the Committee respond if a policy is seen as sound but is ignored, Professor Odom asked? Professor Ahern said it will need to consult.

The next meeting will include action on the civic learning subcommittee, the award selection committees, and, primarily, retention, Professor Ahern announced, and then adjourned the meeting at 2:55.

-- Gary Engstrand

University of Minnesota