

**Senate Committee on Educational Policy (SCEP)**  
**September 13, 2017**  
**Minutes of the Meeting**

*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 represent the views of, nor are they binding on, the senate, the administration or the Board of Regents.*

[**In these minutes:** Introductions and Orientation; Agenda Items, Goal Setting and Prioritizing; Update on the Joint Task Force for Student Mental Health; Preferred Name Discussion; Discussion of Potential Update to Administrative Policy: Undergraduate Degrees with Distinction & Degrees with Honors]

**PRESENT:** Jennifer Goodnough (chair), Nicola Alexander, Michael Anderson, Giancarlo Casale, Elaine Darst, Sydney Elliott, Michelle Dobbratz, Stacy Doepner-Hove, Gayle Golden, Jude Goossens, Scott Lanyon, Kenneth Leopold, Lauren Mitchell, Robert Poch

**REGRETS:** John Carlis, Keith Mayes, Brian Sick, Abby Vogel

**ABSENT:** Nevin Young

**GUESTS:** Matt Bribitzer-Stull, director, University Honors; Professor Sue Wick, co-chair, Joint Task Force for Student Mental Health

**1. Introductions and Orientation**

Chair Jennifer Goodnough welcomed committee members and everyone introduced themselves. Next, Goodnough reviewed the committee's charge, and Amber Bathke, senate associate, gave a short overview on the history and structure of University Senate governance. Goodnough then shared the following updates:

- A small working group looked at the [Administrative Policy: Grading and Transcripts](#) over the summer, and that policy will be brought back to the full committee later this year.
- Goodnough will attend the meeting of all the committee chairs will be held on September 25th, in order to maximize collaboration between committees.
- Goodnough will attend the meeting of the Senate Committee on Finance and Planning (SCFP) on November 14th, as the committee will discuss the financial implications of liberal education requirements.
- Goodnough will represent SCEP on the Provost's Committee on Technology in Teaching and Learning
- Jude Goossens and Michelle Dobbratz have volunteered to represent SCEP on the [Public Engagement Council](#).

Goodnough then reiterated that although SCEP reviews many policies, the committee does not enforce policy. Members then discussed the logistics of electronic discussions and votes. It was

determined that discussion items will undergo a set comments period, at the end of which a vote will be initiated. Deadlines for comments and votes will be made clear.

## **2. Agenda Items, Goal Setting and Prioritizing**

Next, Goodnough invited members to bring forth issues for committee consideration. She first shared priorities from Vice Provost and Dean of Undergraduate Education Bob McMaster, which included liberal education, enrollment management, general undergraduate updates, the [American Talent Initiative](#) for low income students, system-wide undergraduate research, and the Twin Cities Undergraduate Writing Initiative. Vice Provost and Dean of Graduate Education Scott Lanyon informed members of his priorities, which included discussing of graduate education learning goals in preparation for an accreditation visit in 2019, looking at the differing level of benefits graduate students receive depending on whether they are funded through the University (and therefore considered a University employee) or on a fellowship. Members brought forth the following items for consideration:

- Fairness in grading of group work
- Common final exams-- some instructors give common exams for several sections, but the material on the exam is not always covered in every section
- Canvas and the possibility of making syllabi public (Ken Leopold offered to create a “sandbox” course in order to dig around and determine what is possible)
- Graduate student benefits during leaves of absence-- currently grad students who take a leave are left without health insurance
- Rescheduling exams for students with multiple exams on the same day-- there is a policy around this for finals days, but many instructors give finals on the last day of classes, and the policy does not cover these days
- Assuring that required courses are offered in graduate programs, especially in interdisciplinary programs and/or options for students who have been at the University for an appropriate amount of time without a required course being offered
- Requiring departments to offer a certain amount of seminars-- currently they are not supposed to be offered with fewer than five students, but in small departments that means seminars are very rarely offered
- How to communicate policy changes

## **3. Update on the Joint Task Force for Student Mental Health**

Goodnough introduced Professor Sue Wick, co-chair of the Joint Task Force on Student Mental Health. Wick informed members that as the task force completed their report at the end of the 16-17 academic year, this year would focus on implementation of the recommendations within that report. She then showed an image representing the recommendations and asked for feedback. Members provided several suggestions. Finally, she asked the committee to reflect on the following questions:

- Should students with documented mental health concerns be granted early registration? Members said that this is already possible; if the Disability Resource Center (DRC) includes early registration in the student’s accommodation letter, the student’s advisor can make that happen. Members suggesting inviting a representative from the DRC to a subsequent meeting to discuss this.

- Should the [policy](#) allowing students to reschedule exams if they have more three or more final exams in one day be amended to include projects, midterms, etc.?
- How can the task force best work with the system campuses?

Additionally, she asked members to think about faculty members who would be interested in serving on a restructured provost's council on mental health. Goodnough said that including faculty from system campuses would be important.

Gayle Golden said that this would be a good time to start having discussions on many different levels on student mental health. There is still a lot of misinformation and negative perception around the topic, she added, and suggested establishing best practices around responding to accommodation letters, especially emphasizing that accommodations are a result of a conversation between the student, the instructor and the DRC-- it is not mandatory to provide all accommodations requested if this compromises the essential components of the course. Furthermore, she said that this should be done at the unit level, rather than by the DRC. Leopold agreed that such messaging would be better received from peers than from the DRC. Golden shared a [blog](#) that she had written on the subject and invited members to share it. Goodnough added that the messaging should be different for instructors teaching different subject areas and different levels. Giancarlo Casale suggested working with the DRC to establish a process wherein the instructor and the DRC could discuss all accommodations within a course, especially a large lecture course, in a single phone call or meeting, rather than over multiple calls or meetings, as this can be quite time-consuming.

With no further discussion, Goodnough thanked Wick and Wick left.

#### **4. Preferred Name Discussion**

Next, Goodnough asked the committee to discuss implications of the preferred name policy. She explained that once a student chooses a preferred name in PeopleSoft, that name is used in many, but not all, locations. Students do not necessarily know this, however, and Goodnough described an unfortunate incident where a press release went out using a student's preferred name, accidentally outing the student who did not yet use the preferred name in their home town. Goodnough added that there is not an option for preferred pronouns in PeopleSoft. The preferred name can also cause confusion, for example, when a student requests a letter of recommendation from a professor who had them in class under a different name. Goodnough shared language that Morris has posted on their [website](#) in order to increase student awareness of the implications of choosing a preferred name. She said that the [Queer Issues Committee](#) at Morris praised the statement, considering it welcoming to students who identify as trans or gender non-conforming. She asked members whether they thought adding such language to a syllabus statement would be a good idea. Members felt that the syllabus might not be the best place to put such a statement, as there are already many statements and the more such statements there are, the less students tend to read them. However, members agreed that it would be a good idea to craft a statement that could be vetted and made available to instructors who would like to use it in their syllabi. Leopold suggested that students be informed of this during orientation when they get their U Cards. Others suggested a pop-up on the web when a student goes in to enter a preferred name. Bathke informed members that the Gender and Sexuality Center for Queer and Trans Life is

working on a Trans and Gender Non-Conforming Equity Policy, and that this issue would be good to bring up with them in discussions around this policy.

Stacy Doepner-Hove added that this issue is complicated, because while for some students (such as transgender students), it is important that people *do not* know that they use a preferred name (unless the student chooses to disclose that information), but for others (such as international students who go by an English name in the US, but need their transcripts and other official documents under their legal name), it is important that people *do* know they use a preferred name.

## **5. Discussion of Potential Update to Administrative Policy: Undergraduate Degrees with Distinction & Degrees with Honors**

At this point, Goodnough welcomed Matt Bribitzer-Stull, director, University Honors, who had come to discuss a proposed change to the [Administrative Policy: Undergraduate Degrees with Distinction & Degrees with Honors](#). The proposed change was to add the following language under section 3(d) of this policy: “Students whose GPA is 0.1 or less below one of these three bands may be considered for the band above based on exceptional thesis work, the standards for, and process of evaluation for, to be determined by the campus honors program.” The rationale, said Bribitzer-Stull, was that while a student who writes a poor honors thesis can fail to earn the level of Latin honors for which their GPA makes them eligible, there is currently no mechanism to reward students who write an outstanding thesis. Furthermore, students have to decide by the end of their last semester what level of thesis to write, but obviously do not know what their final GPA will be. This policy change could encourage students to write a thesis for the next level of honors if their GPA is within range, or allow them to still achieve that level of honors if their GPA is in range before their final semester but falls slightly below the threshold during the final semester. Bribitzer-Stull emphasized that it would be up to the Honors Program and the student’s thesis committee to determine whether a thesis is good enough to allow the student to achieve the next level of honors, and added that at 3.5, the University has one of the highest GPA thresholds for graduating cum laude among its peers, most of which are at 3.0-3.2.

Members made the following comments:

- Lauren Mitchell asked whether it was a possibility just to recognize an exceptional thesis with “Thesis Honors,” rather than building in this flexibility to the threshold. Bribitzer-Stull said that could be a possibility, but would be a bigger policy change. He also did not think it would be as recognized nationally and globally as Latin honors.
- Nicola Alexander asked whether theses carry graded credit, and Bribitzer-Stull answered that theses themselves do not, but some departments attach the thesis to a course or credits, which do carry a grade. This varies across programs, however.
- Golden asked whether there is an appeals process for students whose thesis committees recommend they earn a lower level of honors than they qualify for based on their GPA. Bribitzer-Stull says that there is.
- Goodnough asked if this change is different from just lowering the thresholds by .1, and Bribitzer-Stull explained that this change would be more of a mechanism to reward excellent thesis work.
- Dobbratz expressed concern that electing to write a higher-level thesis in the hopes of attaining the next level of honors may cause a student’s GPA to suffer. Bribitzer-Stull

acknowledged this concern, and said it would be incumbent upon the student's advisor to counsel them on whether attempting a higher level thesis would be in their best interest. The advisor would make this recommendation based on past grades, workload, etc.

- Michael Anderson asked how many students this would affect in a year, and Bribitzer-Stull said few-- maybe four or five.

Based on this discussion, Goodnough proposed that the committee continue the discussion electronically and, if a consensus could be reached, hold an electronic vote prior to the next meeting.

Goodnough also pointed out that the policy states: "It is the expectation of the Faculty Senate that in general, a campus will not award degrees with honors and with distinction, in total, to more than approximately 10 - 15% of any graduating class" and "the Senate Committee on Educational Policy will review annually data on the number and percentage of students on each campus who receive degrees with distinction and degrees with honors." She said that she would discuss this with Joe Konstan, chair of the Faculty Consultative Committee, to see whether this language should be amended, as SCEP has not done this annually.

Goodnough thanked Bribitzer-Stull and adjourned the meeting.

Amber Bathke  
University Senate Office