

Minutes*

Senate Committee on Educational Policy
Wednesday, February 24, 2010
2:00 – 4:00
238A Morrill Hall

Present: Cathrine Wambach (chair), LeAnn Alstadt, Tom Brothen, Norman Chervany, Megan Evans, Kaleb Kalinowski, James Leger, Robert McMaster, `Cody Mikl, Peh Ng, Jane Phillips, Peggy Root, Henning Schroeder, Paul Siliciano, Elaine Tarone

Absent: Kristen Nelson, Donna Spannaus-Martin, Michael Wade, Joseph Bartolotta

Guests: Jan Morse (Student Conflict Resolution), Kristin Anderson (School of Public Health), Robert Gilmer (Graduate Student, Fisheries and Wildlife, Council of Graduate Students Senator), Mandy Stahre (School of Public Health, Council of Graduate Students President); Professor Thomas Michaels, Chair, Classroom Advisory Subcommittee; Tina Falkner (Academic Support Resources); Jeremy Hernandez (Office of the Vice Provost for Faculty and Academic Affairs), Pareena Lawrence (Morse-Alumni Award Committee); George Green (Graduate School)

Other: Leslie Zenk (Office of the Vice Provost and Dean of Undergraduate Education)

[In these minutes: (1) academic incivility/graduate-student advising; (2) report from the Classroom Advisory Subcommittee; (3) awards; (4) academic freedom syllabus statement]

1. Academic Incivility; Graduate Student Advising

Professor Wambach convened the meeting at 2:05 and welcomed Professor Anderson, Mr. Gilmer, Ms. Morse, and Ms. Stahre to discuss academic incivility and, relatedly, graduate-student advising.

Ms. Morse discussed the Academic Civility Initiative (http://www.sos.umn.edu/staffaculty/academic_civility.php) and the survey of graduate students (http://www.sos.umn.edu/staffaculty/Survey_Summary_AcadInc_UMNTC.pdf). Of those who were not making progress, many related that they had suffered harassment—hostile, intimidating, offensive behavior. About one-third of students experienced it or witnessed it but only about 20% of the incidents are reported. About one-half the students who had experienced it thought about leaving their program; about one-third of students who had witnessed it also thought about leaving. Ms. Morse discussed the work that her office had done in the last year to develop guidelines for dealing with academic incivility and a graduate-student advisor guide (<http://www.sos.umn.edu/staffaculty/Responding.pdf> and http://www.sos.umn.edu/staffaculty/Graduate_Student_Advising_Guide.pdf).

They are also building a component to help facilitate a graceful exit for students who should not be in graduate school, or who have changed their minds, are mismatched, or not meeting expectations,

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Professor Anderson reported, and they want to help students find alternative careers, not just shove them out the door. In addition, Ms. Morse added, they are developing a template to use to evaluate graduate-student advising and to use in orientations. They also participate in the New Faculty Orientation and talk at the meetings of new department chairs. They are preparing materials that can be used in orientation and making them widely available; schools can do orientation in different way and nothing is formalized.

Professor Anderson commented that one of their goals in improving advising is that it is a disservice to junior faculty not to provide them some help. They often do not know what to do, although they want to do the right thing, and the vacuum means they advise as they were advised. They believe there should be required training to be a graduate adviser, because in addition to the ethical issues and improving graduation rates, there is an obligation to other faculty members who must step in to clean up messes that bad advisers leave. That is unfair and it affects the productivity of the other faculty. This is a problem at every major university and Minnesota may be in the forefront of addressing it.

Dean Schroder observed that improving advising was a major topic of the recent report on graduate education and the reaction to it has been positive.

Professor Leger said he was not surprised that proper advising helps retain students and bad advising makes them leave. He asked what the graduation rate for Ph.D. students is. Typically about 50%, Dean Green said, with variations across the humanities, science and engineering, and so on. The undergraduate graduation rate is a national topic of conversation but Ph.D. graduation is not. He said he was sad that not more people were shocked at the data, give that the students involved are among the brightest people in the education enterprise. The University has begun a degree-completion study, including time-to-degree; the national data do not include the latter. Ms. Stahre reported that the Council of Graduate Students does a biennial survey of graduate students and they ask why students change advisers; the next survey will be done in April and they will have questions that focus on advising.

There is a division of opinion about whether training should be mandatory. Professor Anderson said she believes it should be because faculty should not have to continue to clean up after bad practices. Dean Schroeder inquired if the number of cases has gone up, and if so, is that because more people are reporting them, there is more awareness, or because professors are more mean or more incompetent? There is a book on the rise of the bully culture, Ms. Morse reported, which suggests that there is in higher education a new culture of competition for scarce resources and a more corporate culture.

Professor Chervany inquired about the number of students who report being harassed by faculty or staff; the number is about 37%, which is consistent with studies elsewhere, Ms. Morse reported. Professor Chervany said that some it may occur because faculty are unthinking or untrained and may want to improve. The training tools are a good idea, but for the hard-core bullies, the tools will not help. They can start with an invitation to training, Ms. Morse said, and move on to more serious steps if necessary. There was a call to include advising in the evaluation of faculty, Professor Anderson said, and deans must say that the buck stops here and they will not tolerate egregious behavior. Somewhere it must be said that the deans must be responsible.

Bad behavior is less likely to affect undergraduates because they can move out of a class more easily; it is more difficult for graduate students to change their field. The consequences for graduate students can be serious, especially for Ph.D. students. Master's students are more like undergraduates, with more classwork, and they can also move on quickly. Ph.D. education also may include an employment component and lifeline to the job market.

The main catalyst for change is the Director of Graduate Studies, Professor Anderson said, but there is a problem with their lack of authority. The impetus must come from the dean, backing up a chair, Ms. Morse said.

Professor Leger said told Ms. Morse and Professor Anderson their work could have a big impact. A lot of incivility comes from incompetent management (people chosen to do advising who end up abusing students); many faculty would be receptive to offers of help. Dean Schroeder said that advising should be part of any recruiting process; the biggest impact can be in making young faculty members aware of how to deal appropriately with graduate students. While there are workshops that faculty see as a burden, junior faculty would see that in this area they need advice.

They are doing a lot on team and group dynamics, Ms. Morse reported. The research stresses that if there is one bad actor in a group, that can cause a loss of 30-40% in productivity for the group. Who can afford that today?

Professor Wambach asked Dean Schroeder how he saw the Graduate School moving forward in response to the various reports that have been issued. Dean Schroeder said he had a list of things to do, including on advising. On the basis of what he has learned here, he would lean to incorporating advising into the education of new faculty at the point of recruitment, as well as provide it for current faculty, and make all aware that bad advising will have consequences—that it will no longer be a taboo subject. Given the decentralization of graduate education, his office may work with Ms. Morse's office to do something centrally—not everything can be decentralized. Some have expressed concern that with the new structure, the Graduate School will not be an advocate for student concerns. He said that it will be.

Professor Wambach thanked Professor Anderson and Ms. Morse for their report.

2. Report from the Classroom Advisory Subcommittee

Professor Wambach welcomed Professor Shields, chair of the Classroom Advisory Subcommittee (CAS).

Professor Shields brought a statement from CAS on mobile computing devices: "Planning for person-based computing devices in learning strategies and learning spaces," and the statement "The Classroom Advisory Subcommittee encourages the University's academic community to be aware of the increasing availability, affordability and technical capability of person-based mobile computing devices and begin now to consider how to support and incorporate these devices into student learning strategies and learning spaces." Almost all students have such devices, he said, and they are becoming widespread in popular culture. Students will have them and use them in a non-academic context; they can do so in an academic context as well. CAS is sending up a flare and asking the Committee to propagate it to the wider academic and administrative communities so they will think about the support and infrastructure that will be needed.

CAS appended this explanation to its statement:

Members of the Classroom Advisory Subcommittee have received reports from the Office of Classroom Management (OCM) and Office of Information Technology (OIT) about the increasing prevalence and sophistication of person-based mobile computing devices (devices such

as the iTouch, WiFi-enabled PDAs, Internet-capable cell phones, netbooks and tablets) among students. These devices are now, and increasingly will be, carried by students for many non-academic reasons, and it would be prudent and efficient to also utilize these devices in planned learning spaces in support of progressive learning strategies. OCM and OIT are already planning for this new wave of academic computing, but faculty and administrators may not yet be fully aware of the trend or the opportunities it provides.

The purpose of this communication is to bring these devices to the attention of the wider academic and administrative community, to encourage consideration of the physical and virtual infrastructure adjustments that will be needed to facilitate interconnectivity of this wide array of devices, and to broaden the discussion of how to incorporate these devices into new and effective learning strategies. The Classroom Advisory Subcommittee notes, in particular, that the University infrastructure should facilitate interconnectivity of these devices with each other and with the display and Internet accessibility provided for by the laptop Projection Capable Classroom Standard and Active Learning Classroom Standard.

The Subcommittee is aware of the potential financial burden on students caused by a shift in learning strategies to require use of these devices, and encourages the University to support a range of mobile devices that could be chosen by students. The Office of Admissions and others engaged in recruiting new high school and new advanced standing students should be alerted to the range of supported devices so that they can provide guidance to incoming students and their families about the university's utilization of technology in learning.

The Subcommittee also expresses concern about the potential cost of proprietary software, and encourages the development and implementation of campus-wide standards, interfaces and protocols that are compatible with open source operating systems and software, support for open source software, and the use of web-based file creation, storage, and sharing sites such as Google Docs.

Professor Shields noted that the information technology people are aware of how widespread these devices are; it may be that faculty and administrators are not. He also pointed out that CAS recognizes there are potential problems, highlighted in the last two paragraphs of its statement. There could be a shift in financial burden to students if these devices become required. Security is the other major concern.

Committee members offered several observations.

-- An emphasis on high-tech can marginalize immigrant, older, and returning students; this is not an insurmountable problem but it needs to be dealt with.

-- The use of technology can erode the fundamental underpinning of understanding (students who use calculators may not know how to add); that caution needs to be kept in mind. Faculty could be encouraged to use technology when it is not appropriate. Professor Michaels said he did not sense faculty are under pressure quickly to adopt technology and agreed they need to be thoughtful about how they use it. It is seductive, Professor Leger commented, and people can feel they should use it even without overt pressure.

-- The "flare" is a good idea and it would be helpful for the University to create a group with people from different colleges to talk about what they are doing. There is a lot going on with technology that many do not know about. Then University priorities could be identified and where investments should be made can be determined. (Some faculty may use Facebook to communicate with students; Dr. Falkner expressed the hope that no one is communicating private data when they connect with students on Facebook.)

-- One can be nervous about technology and often one wishes to turn off wi-fi because a lot of students use it to do things that are not related to the course and that do not help them learn. When the cost of tuition and books are increasing, the money would have to come from somewhere; to just keep adding technology is not a good idea.

-- Online versus classroom is the wrong way to think about this. The question is the appropriate balance and how to use the best of technology and the best of traditional education.

-- Students can have problems with technology as well. They may learn how to use it but not why or if the change is welcome. They are concerned about privacy. Personal mobile technology is not the same as the use of projectors in the classroom. The technology also allows teachers to be with a student all the time. Technology is very expensive. (But for some, it GIVES students the chance to be with the faculty member when they need to; the faculty member has to make the choice to give out a number/contact, but it allows students to ask questions when they have the question, not during office hours.)

-- Students may not have all this "cool" technology in their workplace; thought must be given to what they will do when they leave the University. There also need to be boundaries set, when it can be used and when it cannot.

-- Depending on the context, there is an "unbelievable potential" for virtual engagement in such areas as vegetation, the built environment, and water quality.

Professor Wambach thanked Professor Shield for his report and said the Committee would get the message out.

3. Awards

The Committee voted unanimously to close the meeting to receive and approve the nominations for the Morse-Alumni and Graduate-Professional awards. Professor Lawrence reported the nominations for the Morse-Alumni Award (6 winners out of 15 nominations); Dr. Hernandez reported the nominations for the Graduate-Professional Award (8 recipients out of 18 nominations). The Committee voted unanimously to approve the nominations.

4. Academic Freedom Syllabus Statement

Professor Wambach introduced the academic-freedom syllabus statements, from the Academic Freedom and Tenure Committee. There were two options, one general, for all classes, and one more focused for classes that engage students in research. It is left up to the instructor to decide which of the two is more applicable.'

The general statement was this: Academic Freedom: Academic freedom is a cornerstone of the University. It includes the freedom to discuss all relevant matters in the classroom. Along with this freedom comes responsibility. At the University of Minnesota, students and instructors should expect their views to be challenged and we all have a responsibility to respectfully discuss divergent points of view. Reports of concerns about academic freedom are taken seriously, and there are individuals and offices available for help. Contact the instructor, the Department Chair, your adviser, the associate dean of the college, or the Vice Provost for Faculty and Academic Affairs in the Office of the Provost. [Customize as appropriate for the course/college/campus]

Professor Wambach said her concern, when she reviewed them, was the lack of any language about who has the final say over what is germane to a course. Students should not have cart blanche to interfere with or protest the content of a course. Dr. McMaster noted that there has been a recent case in which a student wanted to discuss materials that the instructor was not comfortable including. Professor Wambach said she believed faculty should have tight control over a course and not allow students to use a class as a vehicle to promote a political or other agenda. Dr. Falkner suggested citing the Student Conduct Code about appropriate behavior in classrooms.

Ms. Phillips said an instructor can easily get control if one student tries to hijack a class. What if an entire class wants to change the focus of discussion? Must faculty follow the path students want to go down?

Professor Chervany suggested adding wording saying that "Within the scope and content of the class as defined by the instructor, academic freedom is a cornerstone. . . ."

Dean Green said the reality is that faculty have overwhelming power to control content and the worry should be about faculty not giving students a voice if they disagree with the faculty view. In some cases, student academic freedom is marginalized; that is the more pervasive problem. The most important reason for the statement is to give students an avenue to say that their academic freedom has been violated. That is one reason Academic Freedom and Tenure brought the statements forward, Professor Wambach said, so that students can feel they have a right to speak up. But someone has to have the authority to enforce boundaries.

The statements are proposed to be optional. Professor Leger said that if the statement is needed for more tyrannical instructors, they won't read it. Professor Chervany said he would argue that the more general statement should be mandatory. If students feel constrained about speaking their mind, it should be mandatory. Professor Wambach asked Committee members to think about whether the statement should be mandatory and promised it would be on top of the agenda for the next meeting. She adjourned this one at 4:00.

-- Gary Engstrand