Minutes*

**Senate Research Committee**
**Monday, May 11, 2009**
**2:15 - 4:00**
**238A Morrill Hall**

Present: Dan Dahlberg (chair), Melissa Anderson, Arlene Carney, Paula Chesley, Jerry Cohen, Tricia Conway, James Cotter, Leslie Delserone, Tom Hayes, Timothy Mulcahy, Jean Witson, Lynn Zentner

Absent: Peter Argenta, Linda Bearinger, Donald Dengel, Robin Dittman, Genevieve Escure, Michelle Lamere, Frances Lawrenz, Jennifer Linde, Mark Paller, Federico Ponce de Leon, Steven Ruggles, George Trachte, Andrew Van de Ven, Karen Williams

Guests: Associate Vice President Pamela Webb (Sponsored Projects Administration); Dean Steven Crouch (Committee on Graduate Education)

Other: Peggy Sundermeyer (Office of the Vice President for Research)

[In these minutes: (1) community-based research; (2) report from Sponsored Projects Administration; (3) report of the committee on graduate education]

## 1. Community-Based Research

Professor Dahlberg convened the meeting at 2:15 and recalled that the Committee left undecided the question of whether it supported the idea of a policy containing the community-based-research guidelines. He said he would like to know how they would be enforced—and would want to know that before he would be comfortable voting for the guidelines as policy. Professor Hays said he thought Dr. Paller said they would want to make them enforceable in the future. Yes, but how, what are the carrots and sticks, Professor Dahlberg asked. He said he would be happy to say the Committee voted overwhelmingly to support the recommendations as principles but that it wants to see what enforcement would consist of before voting for them as policy.

If the decision about following them is left up to the PI, Professor Cohen commented, it could be difficult to convince the public that the decision would be objective. Even if the guidelines were adopted as enforceable policy, the discretion still rests with the PI, which is a strange kind of policy. Usually there are rules for something to be regulated; here, it is self-identification that would lead to regulation.

Professor Dahlberg recalled Dr Pallor had said he would try to arrange for someone to be present to answer the Committee's questions but without someone here maybe the best thing would be to table the issue until next year. The Committee voted unanimously to table the issue until next year. Professor Dahlberg recalled that Dr. Paller wanted a vote on the principles, which the Committee had done at its last meeting. Ms. Witson said that the guidelines could be part of the IRB process. That is not what the recommendations say but perhaps the guidelines could be attached to the process, Professor Dahlberg agreed, but it would add more for those involved in the IRB reviews to look at.

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

## 2. Report from Sponsored Projects Administration (SPA)

Professor Dahlberg turned next to Associate Vice President Webb for a report on Sponsored Projects Administration.

Ms. Webb reported that her comments were initially prompted by an anonymous (to her) email message outlining problems an assistant professor had had with getting the funds from a grant. She had asked for specifics but never received them, so she could not help. It is frustrating to know that there is a problem but not be able to fix it. She went on to say that while she cannot answer the questions that were raised by that case, she can talk more generally about issues and provide an update.

Ms. Webb distributed copies of two handouts, one a brief newsletter about SPA 2008-09 and the other a "Demystifying Award Set Up" graphic. One element of the complaint she had received is that an award was not set up quickly and invoices were not being paid. She noted that SPA pays subawards but not vendors. She said, however, that SPA is trying to get awards set up quickly so work can begin. She noted in the newsletter a graph presenting the number of awards in the set-up process by two-week period from 7/7/08 to 4/27/09. Last fall was bad, she said, when the number of awards in process increased dramatically after the go-live date for EFS. In early July 2008 the number in process was slightly over 400; by August and September the number had risen to well over 800 and stayed that way until the end of October. By early February 2009, however, the number had fallen back to the pre-go-live level (and in some time periods below the go-live number). They had people working hundreds of hours of overload and brought in consultants to help get rid of the backlog. About 60% of what SPA does changed last July 1; they lost their proposal and award system and CUFS, so there was a dramatic change in how they do business.

SPA receives about 100-125 awards per week, on average, and she would like to have no more than 250-300 in process at any one time (a goal UMN has never achieved). They have gotten back to about 400, but they probably cannot get much lower without additional staff or programming. Professor Hays asked why a goal of 250. Ms. Webb said that is about two weeks' work, which is what is usually required while they wait for various pieces of information and the time it takes to do the actual processing. They could speed up the processing if they could go without an updated budget from the department but faculty and staff are strongly opposed to that. Many people feel passionately they want to get it right if there are cuts.

PeopleSoft is not as friendly as their earlier system for awards, Ms. Webb related. To set up an award in PeopleSoft, they have to go through 30 screens and 100 fields, and modifying an award is more difficult than setting one up in the first place.

Professor Dahlberg speculated that even if SPA got the backlog down to one week, it would still inevitably rise back to three weeks. Ms. Webb agreed, just because it takes time to get budgets set up and so on. They could push the time down some, with more staff, but more important would be system changes. Professor Dahlberg asked how many more people SPA has since PeopleSoft was implemented. Ms. Webb said none who are permanently funded and four who are temporarily funded—out of 23 grant administrators and a total of 55 employees.

In the future, Ms. Webb said, there is enormous potential when they can mechanize the interface between proposals developed and submitted on-line (system-to-system) and awards in PeopleSoft, they will

be able to prorate expenses and populate fields with data. Now they have only the basic functionality and have not reached the potential, but will continue to seek the funding to make the system work better.

Professor Cohen asked about the future of EGMS. They want to replace it, Ms. Webb said, because it is so old it is being held together with bailing wire. They want to replace it with a commercial product that works with the University's systems.

Professor Hays asked when things are good enough. Where will cost savings come if they increase personnel? What part involves an increase in efficiency? Not putting up more faculty time. They could if they had a system-to-system function. Apart from that, it will be at least necessary to obtain permanent funding for their four temporary FTEs or get the system programmed to operate more efficiently so they do not need them. The temporary positions are funded for one more year; after that they either need to keep them or PeopleSoft must get better.

Ms. Webb said the PeopleSoft Grants team is terrific to work with; their problem is limited funds for improvement. In terms of when they are at the point that the turnaround times are "good enough," that is something she needs to talk with the faculty about. That goes to the question of subawards (over 900 per year) which SPA cannot track either for issuing them or relative to paying 4000-6000 invoices annually. Most of the invoices are currently paid quarterly, but they currently expect Stimulus subawards invoices will have to be paid monthly (which will increase the volume of work). SPA has no way to track whether they have received an invoice an invoice is missing, or if faculty have signed off, etc. They have created a business requirements document for a subaward database, and OIT is writing an RFI to find out what it would cost. PeopleSoft is also interested in writing a module. They are not serving the faculty well on subawards, Ms. Webb acknowledged. They need a basic mechanism to track subawards and subaward invoices as they have with awards and proposals. She said she did not believe that SPA is behind on award processing, but that does not mean some are not stuck somewhere; an emphasis over the next few months is writing "back office" reports SPA needs to identify transactions that have been in the office too long or that might be missing altogether (such as continuation funding that has not been received from a sponsor on time).

Professor Dahlberg thanked Ms. Webb for her report.

**3. Report of the Committee on Graduate Education**

Professor Dahlberg turned next to the report of the committee on graduate education chaired by Dean Crouch. He began by saying that he thought the Crouch committee report was outstanding, it identified good and bad points about the Graduate School, and he was very impressed with it, especially given the short period of time it had to do its work.

Professor Cohen said it was a good report but that it could have been written with the Graduate School operating normally, without all the disruption. Professor Dahlberg noted that the charge to the committee was modified after it had begun its work.

There are a number of places where the Graduate School has an impact on research at the University, Professor Dahlberg said. In his view, many of the suggestions in the Crouch committee report should have been implemented when the University originally separated the Graduate School from the Office of the Vice President for Research. A number of functions placed in the Graduate School belonged

in the Vice President's office. He also commented that there seems to be concern about some functions going to the Provost's office, but that is not a topic this (the Senate Research) Committee needs to address.

Professor Cohen said he thought most of the Crouch committee recommendations were reasonable, but each topic deserves significant study on its own. This is no way to run a major research university, to ask a small group of people to operate under a tight timeline to come up with recommendations such as these. The committee did great work for a small group of engaged individuals, but a small group cannot develop a master plan. While the recommendations seem OK, fellowships alone could be studied for a year in order to understand them. To say that changes that could have a large impact should be made on the basis of the Crouch committee's work is not the way to run the University. He said he generally liked what the committee said but the University would be making changes with no data.

Professor Dahlberg said he had a somewhat different view. The Crouch committee was not starting from scratch; in a few places, it suggested the need for additional study, but in a number of cases it recommends moving certain units to a setting many see as more appropriate. Professor Cohen said he believes grants-in-aid should be outside the Graduate School, but he has heard arguments on both sides. There are questions that need to be asked and priorities that need to be set, and there should be a committee with a larger charge appointed to consider those issues.

Professor Dahlberg told Dean Crouch, who arrived at the meeting at this point, that he has not heard from anyone who was not impressed with the quality of the report. Professor Cohen's point, Professor Dahlberg told Dean Crouch, is that given the short time the committee had to work, all of the recommendations could use a full committee to look into them, rather than seeing the Crouch committee report as the final word. The committee did recommend a further look in a couple of places; did it believe the other recommendations should also receive further scrutiny?

Dean Crouch said it did not, except for adding things to the portfolio of the graduate school/office, such as in the area of advising. The committee learned that there is a need for teaching faculty how to advise graduate students, who are most vulnerable in the process. They also recommend the development of metrics to show that improvements are occurring. Some metrics were identified in the strategic-positioning committee on graduate education, but he said he does not know if they are being used in order to hold people accountable. But the Crouch committee did not believe implementation committees were needed for many of its recommendations.

That is not the question, Professor Cohen said. The question is if the process was appropriate: go into crisis mode and ask a committee with a short timeline to develop recommendations. Is that the right way to deal with graduate education at a major university? Most of the recommendations could use more "input" from the broader community. It is an excellent report and set of recommendations, but they may deserve more discussion from other perspectives. He said he did not like the idea of redesigning the University in a crisis, in a short time by a limited committee. His point has nothing to do with the recommendations, but in the end, implementing them as they stand is a bad idea because they represent what a select group of people thought, not what a group drawn from across the University might conclude.

Professor Dahlberg said that that is one reason the Crouch committee report is being reviewed by this Committee, among others: to have broader consultation in order to learn if there are any major problems with the recommendations. He asked Committee members for comment. Dean Crouch said they

looked at graduate education to see if anything needed fixing; they provided their recommendations to the Provost, who will make the decisions.

Professor Hays said that most people probably would not disagree with Professor Cohen, but at the same time most people see the recommendations as meritorious—and they will be reviewed. They have not had strong faculty review, Professor Cohen objected. The Crouch committee was not established by the faculty governance system. But everyone wants to move toward improving the way things are done, Professor Hays responded, and the recommendations can be tweaked as things go along. He said that as a faculty member he would make his views known if he saw a problem.

Professor Dahlberg noted that the McKnight awards are co-sponsored by the Graduate School and the Provost's office; if the awards move and the Provost transfers the support, they would be co-sponsored by the Vice President for Research and the Provost. In his view, Dean Crouch said, the Graduate School is responsible for administering the awards. Co-sponsorship may not be the right term; they are a celebratory event run jointly by Dean Dubrow and Provost Sullivan. Vice Provost Carney said she has been at the event the last four years. When the Graduate School makes a decision about the awards, Dean Dubrow and Myrna Smith review the recommendations with her and Provost Sullivan. The process is administered in the Graduate School but the Provost is fully involved in the final discussions. Dean Crouch noted that there is a dotted-line relationship between the Vice President for Research and the Provost, and if the McKnight awards were transferred to the Vice President for Research, that relationship would need to be discussed.

Ms. Chesley inquired about the recommendation to reduce the staff complement in the Graduate School by 20% (which is about 10 positions). Since they prepared the table of comparisons with some peer institutions, Dean Crouch reported, they have learned that the University of Texas at Austin looks similar to the University of Minnesota; it has a similar number of staff handling applications and admissions. There is need to look at the specifics of how to handle these functions. If the number of staff were reduced by 10 positions, Ms. Chesley asked, they are not saying the tasks are unnecessary but that someone else can perform them? The bottom line, Dean Crouch answered, is that if Minnesota has twice as many people handling these functions as its peers, and the standards of service are the same, they are saying that Minnesota has too many staff and is not efficient. At the same time, he has said to the Twin Cities deans that it is important to keep in mind that this is a discussion about people, all of whom are very worried about the future. There is a human side to the recommendation, which is why the committee was not very specific about how to increase efficiency.

Did the Crouch committee discuss how to address the issue, Ms. Chesley asked? With software? That is correct, Dean Crouch said. All of the three Big Ten peer institutions they examined (Illinois, Penn State, and Wisconsin) have a better online-application system than Minnesota, and the lead developer at Wisconsin worked for the vendor the University has hired, Apply Yourself. The University has a contract with them through 2012; the Crouch committee suggested a discussion with them about what the University needs; if is not possible to adapt their system to Minnesota, then they recommend the University do what Wisconsin and Penn State did: develop their own system.

They also thought there could be efficiencies in tracking student progress, Dean Crouch said. There is a lot of paper moving around, and the Graduate School is trying to move the system online. Doing so could help graduate students considerably and bypass a lot of process work.

Professor Dahlberg said he was concerned that external reviews of programs and centers would not be in the Graduate School in the future. His worry is that the Graduate School provided an independent

measure of programs and it had no special interests in the review one way or the other. If the reviews are handled in the colleges, the dean can affect the outcome either positively or negatively. In the military there are inspectors general who are independent reviewers. There would not be true independence if the reviews are handled in the colleges. He said he would like to see a different body handle reviews of programs and centers. Dr. Carney commented that she did not have strong feelings about where the reviews should be housed and that she sits in on the exit interviews with the reviewers. She said she would like to hear more from faculty, who do a lot of work for the reviews. She said she would like to see program reviews more comprehensive, including more on undergraduate programs and how they do promotion and tenure. Program reviews are needed but now they are skewed toward graduate education. The University and the colleges could get more bang for the buck if they were broader.

Professor Cohen said the University needs to reconcile the way it reviews graduate programs when they are distinct from a department. They are not well-covered now, but those programs are the future. Dr. Carney agreed the interdisciplinary programs are not well-reviewed and could be done better.

Professor Dahlberg noted the report talks about applying for graduate-faculty status and says the status should be automatic. Is anyone ever denied graduate faculty status? And if so, why? Professor Cohen reported that in his program the faculty must vote to grant graduate-faculty status to someone. Dean Crouch said he has never heard of anyone being denied graduate-faculty status. There have been cases in his program where individuals do not have graduate-faculty status, Professor Hays said, because it does entail a commitment to graduate teaching, which can be a problem for some.

Professor Dahlberg commented that the Crouch committee was divided on whether there should be a graduate school or an office of graduate education in the Provost's office, but no numbers were provided. Dean Crouch said that it was about a 50/50 split, but he believed that to a large extent this was a result of the composition of the committee. It appeared to him that those not connected with professional programs generally favored retention of a graduate school. The committee believed that issue needed to be dealt with through further consultation.

The committee was a strong supporter of interdisciplinary programs but did not deal with where the funding for them should come, Dean Crouch related, because they did not believe that subject to be within their purview. They are very different in funding, structure, and organization, Professor Cohen observed.

Professor Anderson commended the committee for doing a lot of difficult work under difficult circumstances.

Professor Dahlberg adjourned with great satisfaction the last meeting of the year.

-- Gary Engstrand