
The University Senate

FACULTY • STUDENT • P&A • CIVIL SERVICE

UNIVERSITY OF MINNESOTA

Senate Committee on Educational Policy (SCEP)

January 22, 2025

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 reflect the views of, nor are they binding on, the senate, the administration or the Board of Regents. The University Senate Office utilized notes taken during the meeting, video recording and transcript of the meeting, and AI to assist in summarizing substantive parts of the meeting transcript to compose these minutes. Minutes are reviewed by the committee before posting.

[In these minutes: Core Curriculum 2025, Tutoring Options]

PRESENT: Katherine Scheil (chair), Erin Baldinger, Shawn Curley, Erin Fider, Jennifer Gunn, John LaVelle, Betsy Murray, Emily Pelton, Alex Risdall, Jennie Row, Claire Segijn, Nadezhda Sotirova, Will Walstrom, Seth Weir

REGRETS: Nina Arleth, Scott Lanyon, Jessica Larson, Aashraya Seth, Raj Singh,

ABSENT: None

OTHERS ATTENDING: Professors Will Durfee and Kathryn Pearson, co-chairs, Core Curriculum 2025 Committee; Katie Russell, director, Undergraduate Policy and Curriculum Administration; Jackie Olsson, director, Tutoring and Academic Success

1. Core Curriculum 2025

Professor Katherine Scheil, chair, called the meeting to order and introduced Professor Kathryn Pearson, co-chair, Core Curriculum 20205 Committee, who was present to update the committee on the [progress of the initiative to redesign the general education requirements](#) for the Twin Cities campus. Key updates included:

- Reduction of Core Areas: The current 7 diversified core courses would shift to 6 foundation classes emphasizing epistemological rather than discipline-specific approaches. Foundations include scientific thinking, quantitative reasoning, and creativity.
- Focus Areas: Students would choose one of four focus areas—civic life, environment, equity, or wellbeing—and complete at least three courses within that area.
- Writing Curriculum: Adjustments include requiring first-year writing, two upper-division writing-intensive courses (one within the major and one in any discipline), and one additional writing-intensive course.
- Global Perspectives Requirement: The previously optional Global Perspectives theme would become mandatory.
- Multidisciplinary Synthesis Course: This capstone course would integrate students' learning across disciplines. Students would analyze their focus area, collaborate on projects, and present their work.
- Student and Faculty Feedback: Over 100 consultation meetings informed revisions, including renaming and refining foundation categories and removing the previously proposed one-credit introductory course.
- Implementation Plan: Faculty fellows would oversee course design, ensuring consistency and coordination across approximately 125 sections of the synthesis course each semester.

The floor was then opened for questions and discussion and Pearson responded as follows:

- John LaVelle asked whether the multidisciplinary synthesis course could be taught by two faculty members from different disciplines to enhance interdisciplinary learning. Pearson explained that logistical challenges would make having two faculty difficult, but faculty fellows would facilitate collaboration among instructors from various disciplines within focus areas.
- Jennie Row asked if students could focus on areas like Race, Power, and Justice (RPJ) or Global Perspectives and take multiple courses in those areas. Pearson clarified that RPJ and Global Perspectives are themes, not focus areas, but courses in these themes can double-count with focus areas. For example, a student focusing on Equity could take courses that also fulfill RPJ requirements.
- Row inquired about how study abroad courses would be assessed to align with the new curriculum. Pearson stated that study abroad courses would need to be recertified to meet the new requirements, just like any other course. These courses could count for up to two requirements, such as Global Perspectives and another foundation or focus area.
- Row asked if the synthesis course could be taken asynchronously or during a student's final year. Pearson noted that the course is intended for the end of a student's general education (not necessarily senior year). Flexibility would ensure students can complete it without delaying graduation, with accommodations for transfer students and exceptions for unique cases.
- Jennifer Gunn asked how the new system would encourage interdisciplinary learning, rather than encouraging students to fulfill general education requirements within their majors. Pearson emphasized the goal of taking focus area courses from different disciplines, ensuring diverse perspectives. The committee plans to monitor implementation and conduct a five-year review to identify potential issues with students overly concentrating general education courses within their major. Adjustments could be made if necessary.
- Scheil asked how the multidisciplinary synthesis course would align with capstone or senior thesis courses. Pearson clarified that the two were distinct in terms of final product and methodology, with the synthesis course focusing on group projects, whereas capstones and theses emphasized individual discipline-specific research.

- Gunn raised two questions: the selection of faculty fellows and the phased recertification process. Pearson explained that faculty fellows, experts in specific focus areas, would train and support faculty teaching synthesis courses. She noted that phased recertification would involve faculty-led committees reviewing courses, with an aim for efficiency. Katie Russell added that smaller, focused faculty committees might expedite the recertification process.
- Row emphasized the importance of incorporating the new digital accessibility requirements into redesigned courses, and proposed scaffolding group work to better prepare students for the synthesis course. She suggested mini grants and graduate RAs to incentivize faculty in course development.
- Emily Pelton echoed Row's points, highlighting the benefits of aligning recertification with new accessibility standards and leveraging this as an opportunity for lasting improvements.
- Erin Baldinger inquired about the transition for current students. Pearson stated that current students would not be affected, and the new curriculum would apply to incoming students starting in fall 2027 (however, current students could choose to switch to the new requirements, if they wanted to). Russell added that both curricula would run concurrently for a few years to ensure availability for all students.

Members thanked Pearson and the committee for their work on this project, and generally expressed enthusiasm for the proposed new approach. Pearson thanked members for their input and departed.

2. Tutoring Options

Scheil informed the committee that the multitude of (potentially duplicative) tutoring services on campus was raised by a member as something for the committee to discuss. Jackie Olsson, director, [Tutoring and Academic Success Center \(TASC\)](#), was present to provide background information:

- TASC offers centralized tutoring for various courses.

- Student English Language Support focuses on language-specific tutoring.
- Many departments, such as chemistry and physics, operate their own tutoring programs.
- The Writing Center provides writing-specific support.
- Peer Research Assistance in the University Libraries helps students with research projects.
- Athletics offers tutoring for student-athletes, who have specific requirements that must be met.
- The Honors Program maintains its own tutoring services, though there is discussion about merging with TASC.

Olsson also highlighted a few challenges:

- Awareness and accessibility:
 - Students struggle to locate and navigate various tutoring schedules and systems.
 - Inconsistent platforms across services complicate finding information.
- Funding and resource allocation:
 - Funding sources and budgets vary across services, making consolidation difficult.
 - TASC allocates approximately \$180,000 annually for tutoring, focusing on 100- and 200-level courses with high drop/fail/withdraw rates.
- Philosophical and historical barriers:
 - A past review of tutoring services (about 7 years ago) indicated that differing philosophies and funding structures prevented merging services.

During the discussion, Olsson responded as follows to questions from the committee:

- Curley questioned whether TASC duplicates efforts by providing tutoring in subjects already covered by academic departments. Olsson said yes, but clarified that TASC offers additional hours, flexibility, and alternative options for students, enhancing accessibility.

- Pelton questioned why resources are spent duplicating department-level efforts instead of addressing gaps in other areas. Olsson explained that TASC aims to serve as a centralized one-stop shop, and emphasized that it complements department efforts and providing broader access.
- Gunn highlighted the difference between skills-focused services (e.g., writing or research support) and course-specific tutoring. Olsson acknowledged that both approaches are essential, noting that while TASC emphasizes course support, tutors also address broader skills like study techniques and time management.
- Curley asked whether TASC refers students to other tutoring resources as appropriate, and Olsson confirmed that they do. She added that many faculty and staff are still unaware of these resources, indicating a need for greater promotion and integration of information. Curley inquired about whether more could be done to consolidate scheduling systems for all tutoring services. Olsson noted that a unified scheduling platform would simplify access for students and reduce confusion caused by disparate systems.

Scheil and Amber Bathke, senior senate associate, discussed potential next steps, including advocating for a centralized scheduling system and exploring the inclusion of consistent information in Canvas. Olsson supported this idea, suggesting that a standardized resource in Canvas could serve as a reliable hub for students seeking tutoring and academic support.

The committee expressed general support for these recommendations.

Amber Bathke

University Senate Office