

Minutes*

Senate Committee on Educational Policy
Wednesday, April 12, 2006
1 – 3 pm
238A Morrill Hall

Present: Richard McCormick (chair), William Bart, Maureen Cisneros, LeAnn Dean, Gail Dubrow (George Green), Josh Feneis, Paul Siliciano, Donna Spannaus-Martin, Craig Swan, Doug Wangensteen, Joel Weinsheimer

Absent: Vernon Cardwell, Shawn Curley, James Leger, Eric Ling, Claudia Neuhauser, Mary Ellen Shaw, Sarah Tuttle

Guests: David Langley

Other:

[In these minutes: (1) New Graduation Rate Goals, (2) Future Goals for the Center for Teaching and Learning Services]

Professor McCormick convened the meeting at 1:10.

1. New Graduation Rate Goals

Vice Provost Swan discussed graduation rate goals and distributed information by way of background. He shared data for the Twin Cities campus showing the number of credits at the time of graduation by college for both freshmen and transfer students. He also indicated that in the fall he would like to return to the committee with additional data on required credits by major and would like the advice of the committee as to whether there should be parameters or guidelines in terms of the number of requirements, recognizing that some degree programs are under licensure and accreditation standards. Vice Provost Swan reported that the President and Provost had asked if current graduation goals are aspirational enough given the University's goal to become a top three research institution. Ms. Dean said that the Morris campus had identified goals in light of strategic planning.

Vice Provost Swan referred to various graphs in the information distributed. For the Twin Cities campus retention and graduation rates have been increasing. Four-, five- and six-year graduation rates have all increased by about 10 percentage points in the past few years. While we are no longer at the bottom when compared to other AAUDE schools and reaching current goals would move the University into the top third to half of these schools, the question is whether we should revise our goals in light of the broader aspirations associated with strategic positioning. Vice Provost Swan said that he would appreciate this committee's input before presenting information to the provost and President.

The committee discussed the information it was presented with. Professor Siliciano asked if one point of discussion was the graduation rates and credit requirements within colleges. Vice Provost Swan spoke to the number of credits within colleges, citing that the engineering program here

* 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.

requires 128 credits, while other institutions, such as Berkeley, only required 120 credits. In addition, state grants and financial aid are limited to 120 credits.

Professor McCormick said that in the CLA Honors program there are a small number of students who enter with many AP or PSEO credits and then complete their degrees in two to three years, but that most such students choose to do more in four years, graduating with more credits. Vice Provost Swan said that many policy-makers argue that students have a responsibility to graduate in a timely manner and Professor Weinsheimer said that it may be time to review the number of liberal education credits that are appropriate. Vice Provost Swan noted that the issue was on the agenda of the Council of Liberal Education. Professor McCormick said that he felt that the breadth of the university's current Liberal Education (LE) requirements should not be narrowed. The committee discussed the data on graduation rates. Vice Provost Swan said that they were cautiously optimistic that current goals would be achieved, and that the challenge is whether the University should be more aggressive in its graduation rates. Professor Siliciano asked what other techniques and tools had been discussed. Vice Provost Swan said that complexity of degree requirements is an important issue and that the committee should address this by next fall. Some ways to improve graduation rates include communicating clear expectations and reducing the small hassles a student encounters so that students can stay engaged.

Professor Wangenstein asked Vice Provost Swan's opinion as to why graduation rates have increased. Dr. Swan replied that clear expectations are being set for students, and the academic preparation of students coming to campus is improving. Vice Provost Swan said that the evidence suggested that helping students bond with the campus helps. Financing an education is often an issue as well, and there needs to be continued push on scholarship support. Vice Provost Swan cited the University's Founders Opportunity program and significant monies from private individuals and corporations to spearhead scholarship initiatives.

2. Future Goals for the Center for Teaching and Learning Services

Professor McCormick welcomed Dr. David Langley, Director, Center for Teaching and Learning Services. Dr. Langley discussed his ideas for the Center and distributed information. Dr. Langley reviewed the Core Services and Programs which the Center offered, and highlighted the classes and workshops available through the Teaching Enrichment Services. Professor Green said that offering the topics at least two times to new TAs would be very helpful so they would have a couple of opportunities to fit it in. Dr. Langley said the point was well taken and noted many topics for the Teaching Enrichment Series. Professor Wangenstein asked if the coordinate campuses had centers comparable to Teaching and Learning Services, and Dr. Langley cited some examples at the other campuses, but also stated that the Center on the Twin Cities campus was very large in comparison.

Dr. Langley went on to review those task force recommendations which might impact Teaching and Learning Services as they were brought forward. He also discussed the proposals for enhancing excellence in teaching at the University and implications for future directions. Professor Green said that he felt the most potent tool was the early career program offered by the Center, and Professor McCormick added that the mid-career program was important as well, which was also part of the Bush Grant. Dr. Langley cited meetings with early career faculty, and noted points outlined in enhancing excellence in Teaching at the University of Minnesota and Implications for Future directions. He stressed that great first year courses were needed for the sake of the students and these courses affect the students' success at the university. Dr. Langley asked the committee for their thoughts regarding language issues with international faculty, as had been present in the legislative session, and added that International Teaching Assistant (ITA) program worked with the international graduate students. Dr. Langley presented ideas for workshops for international faculty and cited examples of difficulties for international faculty, and added that students must also learn to deal with different dialects in an increasingly global environment. Mr. Feneis pointed out that it wasn't just language barriers but teaching methods that were also problematic. Dr. Langley said that the Center's

programs were always in service of the pedagogy, no matter what issues may arise. Professor Green asked that the Center not be too demanding with the time commitments of teaching assistants as they are already under enormous pressure. However, if language is a barrier, it is a difficult way to start a teaching career. The committee discussed whether there were faculty hired that do not have to teach, and Professor Weinsheimer said that all hires must teach. He stressed that it must be conveyed that teaching skills at an acceptable level is necessary for the hires. Dr. Langley pointed out that often self-awareness needed to be raised, in that non-native speakers assume they are being understood. Professor McCormick said that student satisfaction was going up because there have been concerns raised and there is an interest in improving teaching. Professor Weinsheimer said that teaching had been thoroughly examined in the tenure process, but that there had been hesitation about how to handle teachers who needed remedial help. He asked if the Center for Teaching and Learning Services was a place that could assist with remedial issues. Dr. Langley said yes, that the Center was open to anyone at any time and said that the Center was an office that tries to make good teachers better. He noted that all consultations are confidential, and what was raised in a consultation is to get at the heart of what was really going on in the classroom.

Dr. Langley noted that the Center was also working on defining "targeted" instructors as mentioned in the task force recommendations. He expressed concern that "targeted" meant young faculty members, and stressed that the Center was there for all faculty and if in fact certain faculty have been targeted it was kept confidential. Professor McCormick said that graduate students are monitored so they can take advantage of mentoring, and Professor Green said that training and mentoring was built into graduate students track. Vice Provost Swan said that in some promotion and tenure files, participation the Center's programs is viewed positively, as a strong commitment to teaching. Dr. Langley gave examples of those who had sought such services, and the committee discussed teaching designations and who benefited from the Center's programs and gateway courses for adjunct teachers and T&As. Dr. Langley said that often adjuncts get lost in the programs, but that they are important to gateway programs and they tried to place them in those. Professor Green asked about teaching specialists, saying that some were replacing graduate teaching assistants. Professor McCormick said that adjunct teaching specialists was a wide-spread category in the languages and that they were not required to do research, but noted that they were an important sector in his department. The committee discussed the parameters of teaching specialists. Dr. Langley said that they were reorganizing the Center's database to know better whom they had been serving and who they needed to reach out to. He said that there was still a lot of work yet to be done and that the documents distributed summarized the larger issues. Dr. Langley emphasized that teaching was an on-going process and life-long endeavor.

Professor Weinsheimer said that from all he'd heard and read about one-on-one consultations, they'd been received very well. The University would have to think more seriously about peer review, and he added that non-faculty will never be welcomed to do peer reviews but the input from the Center would be valuable in those discussions. Professor McCormick thanked Dr. Langley for the informative presentation.

Professor McCormick briefly updated the committee on evaluation of team taught courses, saying that a faculty member had said that he was concerned that the policy makes no mention of how to evaluate such courses. Professor McCormick said at this point the subcommittee to be appointed to reconsider the mandated questions could make recommendations on this issue. He also noted that Professor Michael Rodriguez would be reporting to the committee soon on student release questions.

Professor McCormick adjourned the meeting at 3 pm.

--Mary Jo Pehl

