



OAKLAND UNIVERSITY SENATE

OAKLAND UNIVERSITY SENATE

Thursday, 10 January 1985
Fourth Meeting
Gold Room A, B, C

MINUTES

Senators Present: Appleton, Berger, Bertocci, Boganey, Burke, Bledsoe, Carbone, Cass, Champagne, Chapman-Moore, Chipman, Christina, Copenhaver, Downing, J. Eberwein, R. Eberwein, Eliezer, Evans, Frankie, Gerulaitis, Grossman, Hammerle, Hildebrand, Horwitz, Howes, Ketchum, Kleckner, Lindell, Moore, Pine, Russell, Scherer, Schimmelman, Schwartz, Splete, Strauss, Tomboulian, Tracy, Tripp, Wagner.

Senators Absent: Arbour, Brown, Butler, Coppola, Edgerton, Evarts, Federlein, Garcia, Hamilton, Hartman, Heubel, Hough, McCabe, Moorhouse, Pino, Shichi, Snider-Feldmesser, Windeknecht.

Summary of Actions;

1. Minutes of 15 November 1984 (Gerulaitis; Bledsoe). Approved.
2. Motion to fill vacancies on the Campus Development and Environment Committee (Hildebrand; Tracy). Approved.
3. Motion concerning election of courses on S/U basis (Downing; Horwitz). Remanded to UCUI (Copenhaver; Tracy).
4. Response to the report of the Governor's Commission on Higher Education in Michigan (Champagne)
5. Sense-of-the-Senate resolution on book store pricing policy (Strauss; Tripp). Approved.

Mr. Kleckner called the meeting to order, a bit belatedly, at 3:23 p.m., calling at once for consideration of the minutes of 15 November 1984 (Moved, Ms. Gerulaitis; seconded, Ms. Bledsoe). These were approved without corrections or comments.

The first item of business met with similarly quiet approbation. Upon motion of Ms. Hildebrand, seconded by Mr. Tracy, the Senate approved the appointments of David Housel as chair of the Campus Development and Environment Committee for the Winter 1985 semester and of Janice Schimmelman as member. Both changes of state attend Ms. Hirschfeld-Medalia's sabbatical leave.

The next proposal, the first substantive motion to come before this body in the 1984-85 academic year, proved decidedly more controversial. Mr. Downing, seconded by Mr. Horwitz, introduced the following motion from the University Committee on Undergraduate Instruction (UCUI):

Any undergraduate student who has completed at least 29 credit hours towards graduation may elect to take up to eight (8) credits of course work at Oakland University on an S/U grading basis, assuming that all prerequisites have been completed, and subject to the following restrictions:

1. These credits may only be counted as free elective credits. They may not be used to fulfill University or program requirements of any kind, including requirements for remedial skills, general education, majors, minors, or concentrations.
2. Any courses that are designated S/U in the catalog or schedule of classes will not count toward the limit of eight S/U credits per student.
3. The student must elect the S/U option within the first week of class by filing the appropriate form with the Registrar's Office.
4. Instructors will not be informed on their enrollment lists as to who are the S/U students, if any. They will simply assign numeric grades (0.0 to 4.0) to all enrolled students. For students who have elected the S/U option, the Registrar's Office will then convert numeric grades from 2.0 to 4.0 to an "S" and numeric grades from 0.0 to 1.9 to a "U."
5. Neither the "S" nor the "U" grade will be included in the student's GPA.
6. Only if a student later needs a numeric grade in order to fulfill a program requirement because of a change in program status may the "S" be converted back to the original numeric grade, which will then be included in the student's GPA. The student must file an appropriate request form in the Registrar's Office.

Mr. Kleckner initiated discussion by noting that impetus toward this proposal had come last year from Senator Horwitz, who called on the Senate floor for consideration of options that would allow students to elect courses on an S/U basis in addition to the relatively small number of courses now offered exclusively that way. He then turned over the floor to Mr. Downing, who explained the reasoning behind UCUI's motion. He began by reviewing some fundamental premises such as that these elections should be confined to a "venture credit" mode to encourage relatively advanced students (seniors, juniors, and some sophomores) to explore areas outside their specializations; they are not to be used as a means of avoiding a program requirement or avoiding a grade for a required course. He recognized that many academic programs offer few or no electives so that this option is most likely to be used by BGS candidates and Arts and Sciences majors but indicated that it would be available to anyone. The proposal is designed to tie in with the current S/U system and, like that, has no application to a student's GPA. The reversibility issue has proven the most controversial point. Supposing optimistically that such ventures may occasionally succeed in luring a student into a program that requires a course originally taken as a free elective, UCUI recommends that the numerical grade reported by the instructor to the Registrar be substituted for the "S" in order to meet the new program requirement. The Steering Committee, in its contradictory wisdom, worries about administrative perplexities and recommends irreversibility?leaving departments to credit such grades through the familiar petition process.

Mr. Strauss, thinking that this option requires a certain maturity likely to characterize juniors

and seniors, expressed concern about opening the option to sophomores. Mr. Carbone explained that scheduling factors make sophomores the last to register so that some may need more flexibility in electing unexpected courses without ruining their GPAs. The sophomore year has the advantage also of being a good time for a student to explore a wholly new area with opportunity later to build on that discovery.

Calling for "free and frank discussion," Mr. Bertocci then inquired of the Registrar about the administrative feasibility of the proposal. Mr. Bartalucci envisaged no great problem as the motion is currently worded unless the new policy should attract an unexpectedly high number of students. So far as the reversibility issue is concerned, he would prefer to leave the S or "U" on the record and simply ask the caretakers of each program waive the usual requirements. Mr. Tracy liked that suggestion and thought that programs should handle changes exclusively through petitions?never changing the official "S" or "U" but adjusting records internally.

Ms. Tripp introduced a thorny question by inquiring what might be meant by "University or program requirements of any kind." Does this language not include the requirement of so many credits at the 300 level and even the requirement of total hours required to earn a baccalaureate? She advised modifying language to clarify which requirements are meant to be excluded by this policy. One questionable application she raised?the matter of whether S/U electives were to be excluded for use in prerequisites for required courses?brought an affirmative reply from Mr. Downing. UCUI intends the restriction to apply to any course directly required within an academic program. Mr. Appleton subsequently inquired what courses UCUI had in mind as remedial and wondered how a student could discern from the catalog that our faculty regards MTH 111-112 in such light. Noting that the concept of a totally free elective credit is hard to discern before graduation?if then, Mr. Tomboulian favored omission of restriction #1 entirely. The necessity of #1 struck Mr. Burke as a moot point also so long as the student, graded blind by the instructor, needs to get an authentic 2.0 in any case. Mr. Kleckner noted, however, that some units require stronger performance than that in specific courses.

Mr. Horwitz, after congratulating UCUI for its dual achievement in responding to a Good and Welfare request and in bringing the first substantive motion of the academic year before the Senate, expressed similar doubts about #1, since every course is needed at least for graduation credits. He did, however, report strong urging from the School of Economics and Management to retain #6 on reversibility since programs within his school often require higher grades than 2.0 for a particular course or a loftier average over a set of courses for admission to major standing. Ms. Chapman-Moore, supporting his argument from an advising point of view, urged retaining reversibility since many, many students shift majors at least once.

This discussion sparked sudden curiosity in Mr. Copenhaver about the epistemology of the issue: what exactly is the status of the grade? He wondered whether the student would know the actual numerical grade. Mr. Kleckner thought it realistic that the student would make such a discovery before filing a petition, and Mr. Tracy noted that a simple post card at the end of the class would inform the student of the numerical grade actually being submitted by the instructor. He thought it would be impossible to withhold such information, and Ms. Chapman-Moore thought it unnecessary. When Mr. Copenhaver expressed discomfort about manipulating a grade on the basis of its quantity, she pointed out that such action would only be taken in the event of a program change. That response led Mr. Tracy to a related question: whether a change of major would then entitle a student to elect another two courses as

"venture credits" on an S/U basis. Mr. Downing thought it conceivable but only in the case of a student intent on remaining at the University for an uncommon length of time. When Mr. Kleckner inquired where the hidden grade would reside if needed years later?with the Registrar or the Instructor, Mr. Bartalucci said it would always be accessible in institutional records.

When Mr. Russell Inquired whether UCUI had examined policy at other schools (such as the University of Michigan, which he knows to have more liberal provisions for S/U election), Mr. Bartalucci reported that most Michigan universities follow similar guidelines to those outlined here. Reversibility exists in one case. Mr. Russell, advocating greater latitude, argued for allowing S/U election of general education courses in hopes of attracting students to courses or instructors with rigorous reputations. Mr. Copenhaver objected, however, to distinguishing in this manner between major courses and general education, while Ms. Tripp?speaking as a frequent instructor of general education courses in History?favored retaining the exclusion.

Questions of timing arose in several forms. Mr. Boganey wondered why restriction #3 required a decision in the first week of classes even though existing academic regulations give students two weeks for adding courses. Mr. Russell wondered why not require the decision to be made up-front at registration, although Mr. Horwitz advocated giving "the poor devils a chance to look at a syllabus." Mr. Strauss hoped that the Steering Committee would apply a sunset law to this legislation, requiring that it be brought back to the Senate for review after three years. Mr. Bertocci, while approving the general idea of periodic reconsideration, thought a longer interval might be necessary before the effect of this option would become known.

With so many puzzlements besetting the Senate, Mr. Kleckner suggested that it might be in order for this body to remand the issue to UCUI for reformulation (Moved, Mr. Copenhaver; seconded, Mr. Tracy). When Mr. Russell inquired which issues the committee should specifically reexamine, a list was proposed that included the need to define program requirements or drop #1 entirely, the importance of reversibility, the implications of multiple changes of major, the time allowed for decision, and the possibility of restricting only those courses specifically required within a major. Mr. Christina suggested that UCUI be informed that the Senate was concerned that students might be "unduly inconvenienced" by the proposed policy, and Mr. Appleton cautioned UCUI to watch for interaction effects among suggested amendments. With items 1 and 6, particularly, students can be expected to exercise all their options. Mr. Burke wondered whether UCUI was being asked to bring forth a proposal for another first reading or simply for a second reading, and Mr. Kleckner responded that that decision would depend upon whether the language proposed simply modifies the existing proposal or constitutes a substitute motion. When the question was called, it carried without opposition?thereby returning this motion to committee.

Having spied President Champagne arriving in the back of the room, fresh from a conference with a member of the Board about the report of the Governor's Commission on Higher Education in Michigan, Mr. Kleckner suggested inverting the order of business so that presidential remarks might precede the report on bookstore pricing. With the approval of the body, Mr. Champagne then came forward to discuss the Commission report with his senatorial colleagues. Recognizing it as a substantial document, in most respects an excellent one, Mr. Champagne noted that the report begins to run into difficulty where the Commission becomes specific rather than general in its recommendations. Two major problems struck him as most important. First came the misclassification of Oakland University as a regional state college

rather than a comprehensive research university with the attendant recommendation that funding follow this faulty taxonomy. Acknowledging that our institution is an anomaly in Michigan and fits into no routine category, he pointed out that we are doing all we can to change our location within the classification system despite the awkwardness of being unable to appeal to a Commission which, having released its report, immediately disbanded. All we can hope is to persuade Governor Blanchard and the legislature not to implement that part of the report, particularly as funding based on misclassification would compound the disadvantages already experienced by our under-funded institution. The second major problem was the Commission's apparently complete misunderstanding of the relationship between higher education and economic development: its confusion of economic development, which is a broadly shared responsibility, with technology development, which tends to concentrate in a few institutions. In addition to these two major problems, he noted a few lesser ones such as allocation of funds for construction of new buildings.

After identifying problem areas in the report, the President went on to inform the Senate about what we are doing to correct misperceptions of Oakland University. He indicated that he is preparing a reaction statement with respect to all 23 recommendations and will soon be circulating that statement to the entire University community. Externally, he and other Oakland representatives have been talking to the Governor, key legislators, and community leaders. These talks give him hope that we shall not be disadvantaged from a financial point of view by this report even though the text itself (now unamendable, given the Commission's disbanding) is likely to haunt us for years?especially in areas of student and faculty recruitment. To counteract apprehended harm, he has taken strong public positions on certain issues. He then invited questions on the report and on its vastly more extensive technical appendix, a publication he characterized as "a depressing document" that includes astounding statements such as one that denies state responsibility to provide geographic access to any graduate program. He intimated that this document has built-in self-destructive mechanisms likely to be activated by close reading.

Mr. Russell initiated questioning by inquiring whether, if Oakland University had been placed on its proper branch in the system, it would support technology development. Mr. Champagne thought that it would; he perceives ours as the fifth major research university in Michigan but would be content to follow existing national classifications which recognize our comprehensive mission. Mr. Grossman wondered whether officials of other institutions think (a) that they are misplaced or (b) that we are. Recognizing that we are in a minority on this one, Mr. Champagne saw Lake Superior State and Oakland University as potentially the only two schools seriously misclassified. He hoped that this anomaly might work to our advantage. In trying to account for the classification system, he faulted the Commission for its research? pointing out that only one member visited us (briefly) when the report had already been substantially drafted. In that respect we were more fortunate than Western Michigan University, which never saw any of these worthies at all. We submitted all information requested by the Commission, but our President had only one fifteen-minute opportunity to testify before it. He reiterated that Oakland is, indeed, an anomaly in the state and hard, therefore, to understand without special attention. Our research compares somewhat unfavorably in funding levels to that of Michigan Technological University but excels that school's scholarly production in terms of scope and quality. Mr. Burke suspected that the main obstacle to correct classification is the combination of a comprehensive university with a local student body. He wondered whether people in Lansing might doubt that the state can afford this anomaly. Arguing that our pattern characterizes urban universities nationally, Mr. Champagne hoped that these fears were groundless. He worried that the spirit of scholarship

that is valued here finds little appreciation elsewhere.

The President concluded his presentation by offering reassurance that, while we may be upset at this point and while our institutional ego may be a bit damaged, the report still gives us a rallying point around which to correct a misleading image of our institution. When the process is over with, he averred, we will come out fine. The aggravating document, however, will go on forever?complete with self-contradictory recommendations of a sort that would confine schools like ours to such nonexistent offerings as "high market demand non-technical business courses." He promised to take a vigorous public stand on this matter, even while expressing concern that calling attention to the errors of the report may unfortunately call attention to its very existence. Mr. Kleckner concluded the discussion by alerting Senators to the fact that Oakland University is now developing reams of material on what is going on here now and will be requesting considerable information in the next few weeks with which to respond to any possible challenges. He wants to talk about accomplishment because there is so much of it here. Oakland University is a research university: he sees no doubt about it. It stands on its own merits and means to publicize them widely.

Attention then turned to the third item of new business: the report on bookstore pricing. Mr. Kleckner offered some background on this issue, calling attention to his report that accompanied the agenda. He explained how the bookstore was assessed a dollar quota to support the general fund and wondered how Senators would rank this problem area relative to other priorities. He then turned over the floor to Mr. Wilson, who offered to answer any questions.

Mr. Ketchum asked about the actual markup from wholesale price on a typical textbook and was told that his question could only be answered in terms of publishing industry norms which suggest a 20% markup for textbooks. Oakland University charges a 30% markup on its net-pricing formula. When Mr. Ketchum mentioned the large markup beyond his publisher's suggested price that he had discovered on the textbook he himself had written, Mr. Wilson offered to let him examine the formulas actually applied here. Mr. Ketchum wondered whether there is a differential system for bookstore pricing and learned that categories vary. One method is used for textbooks, but our bookstore does not unilaterally raise prices on other items (things like sweatshirts) with higher industry mark-ups. Textbooks, he pointed out, represent 80% of our trade.

Mr. Ketchum denounced this policy as a hidden tax on students and indicated that he would prefer to see an overt increase in the fee for Oakland Center use although Mr. Wilson pointed out that the profit is used to support the general fund, not the Center. Identifying the real issue as markup beyond suggested retail price, Mr. Tracy indicated that we have a monopoly here and are extorting a monopoly profit on unsuspecting customers. He would rather see a modest tuition increase. It bothered him that the University had ever resorted to this expedient and appalled him that it should continue the practice. Mr. Kleckner and Ms. Bledsoe both recalled that, at the time of the original decision, tuition costs were rising so steeply and rapidly that no acceptable alternatives could be found.

Mr. Burke considered the present way of raising that money unfair, noting that it hits hardest that student who already pays most for books. Citing his own horror story on pricing, he mentioned that a used text here sometimes costs more than the publisher's recommended price for a new one. When Mr. Carbone asked Mr. Wilson why even resale books cost so much when

students make so little from selling their used copies, Mr. Wilson said that our bookstore follows industry standards in this area. Mr. Moore confirmed reports of elevated costs, noting that students in Nursing are quite aware of this supposedly hidden cost. The markup lifts the price of Nursing textbooks as high as eighty and ninety dollars even while the students see these same volumes on the shelves of B. Dalton for significantly less. He had been informed that he is not free to go off campus to order books, though murmured responses of his fellow-Senators suggested that many would have no scruples.

Speaking of scruples, Ms. Scherer objected to putting Mr. Wilson and the Oakland Center on the defensive and identified the issue as a University-wide ethical problem. Such markups, she maintained, are a totally unethical practice. Mr. Strauss, agreeing, wondered whether our legislators know that this unethical practice is going on even now, when many Michigan students are being priced out of the education market. Academic values suffer along with moral concerns, according to Ms. Tripp, who pointed out that faculty are forced to modify academic objectives in ordering texts. She offered her own horror story about how her History colleagues attempted to provide their students with readings by making up packets of materials typed, reproduced, and priced in their office only to find the packets marked up in the bookstore (an error Mr. Wilson acknowledged and assured her had been corrected).

Various people preferred an increase in tuition as a response to this problem while others opted for an increase in the Oakland Center use tax. Mr. Christina, however, asked for a wider array of choices. He urged creativity in finding ways to make money. Mr. Kleckner welcomed all creativity. Mr. Boganey reported the student view that there is no reason why the \$170,000.00 needs to come directly or only from students. Ms. Tripp wondered whether any other units within the Oakland Center may have been under assessed but learned from Mr. Wilson that no additional funds may be expected from that source without substantial program cuts. An operating deficit looms. Mr. Horwitz suggested Wednesday-night Bingo.

Trying to figure out how the Senate could make itself useful in solving this problem, Mr. Strauss inquired, for the sake of argument, what would happen if this body should instruct Mr. Wilson that the bookstore must charge the publisher's suggested retail price. Mr. Wilson conjectured that it would be necessary for the University to think of other ways of saving money such as faculty layoffs or Oakland Center staff cutbacks unless alternative means of revenue enhancement could be found. Mr. Strauss, seconded by Ms. Tripp, then offered a sense-of-the-Senate resolution to the effect that the University Book Center must adopt publishers' suggested retail book pricing as of 1 March 1985. This motion brought forth ideas for more generally worded resolutions such as that suggested by Mr. Bertocci to the effect that the Senate is appalled by the situation described in the report it has received and instructs the University to strive to move as soon as possible to publishers recommended pricing. Mr. Ketchum offered a substitute motion to that effect only to encounter a parliamentary dilemma when Mr. Strauss refused to accept the substitution and insisted on retaining the March deadline even though Mr. Kleckner appraised its chances of implementation as negligible. While recognizing that book prices are outrageous here, Mr. Carbone wondered whether the Senate was focusing on the real issue. He inquired how the Executive Budget Committee arrived at the existing formula and wondered where students would be hit if the sense-of-the-Senate resolution should pass. The question being called, the resolution then carried without dissent.

Having thus vindicated their concern for the general welfare, Senators abstained from offering

any private resolutions for the good of the order. Nor did anyone put forth any information items. With Ms. Tripp's welcome call for adjournment, therefore, the body suspended its efforts for another month at 5:06 p.m.

Respectfully submitted:
Jane D. Eberwein
Secretary to the University Senate

Back to

OAKLAND UNIVERSITY

S E N A T E

Home Page