



OAKLAND UNIVERSITY SENATE

OAKLAND UNIVERSITY SENATE

Thursday, 14 November 1985
Third Meeting
Rooms 128, 129, 130 Oakland Center

MINUTES

Senators Present: Appleton, Barclay, Barnard, Barthel, Bertocci, Bingham, Blankenship, Blatt, Burke, Carbone, Cardimen, Chapman-Moore, Chipman, Clatworthy, Copenhaver, Diltz, Downing, J. Eberwein, R. Eberwein, Edgerton, Evarts, Feingold, Grossman, Hamilton, Hart-Gonzalez, Hartman, Herman, Hildebrand, Horwitz, Ketchum, Kleckner, Metzner, Reddy, Righter, Rozek, Schimmelman, Srodawa, Straughen, Strauss, Taylor, Terry, Tripp, Willoughby, Witt.

Senators Absent: Boganey, Cass, Champagne, Chatterjee, Frankie, Garcia, Hightower, Hough, Khapoya, Liboff, Lindell, McCabe, Pettengill, Pine, Russell, Swartz, Wilson.

Summary of Actions:

1. Minutes of 17 October 1985 (Copenhaver; Hart-Gonzalez). Approved.
2. Motion regarding courses numbered between 000 and 099 (J. Eberwein; Chipman). First reading.
3. Amendment to delay Implementation of motion until 1989-90 (Appleton; Hamilton). First reading.
4. Good and welfare inquiry on intervals between scheduled classes (Carbone). Referred to Registrar.

Mr. Kleckner called the meeting to order at 3:14 p.m., proceeding directly to consideration of the minutes of 17 October 1985. These were approved without discussion? upon motion of Mr. Copenhaver, seconded by Ms. Hart-Gonzalez. These minutes certified the completion of all old Senate business, thereby freeing attention for the first substantive motion of the legislative year: a motion from the University Committee on Undergraduate Instruction (UCUI).

Ms. Eberwein (seconded by Mr. Chipman) introduced a tripartite proposal:

MOVED that course numbers 000 to 099 be designated for skill development courses specially designed to aid incoming students who have significant deficiencies in their academic background to prepare for courses numbered 100 and above. Credits earned in these courses may not be presented to satisfy minimal graduation requirements in any academic program. These courses are included in the student's GPA.

Any changes involving the numbering of courses in the range 000 to 099 are

subject to the approval of the University Committee on Undergraduate Instruction.

This policy is to be implemented in the 1987-88 academic year, with the University using the intervening time to inform area high school and community college personnel of the new policy.

Ms. Eberwein introduced this motion in the context of last year's Commission on University Excellence (CUE) report, noting that it is intended to fit into a pattern of changes initiated some months ago with approval of new admission requirements. She reported that the motion emerges from detailed study by an UCUI subcommittee and called attention to that body's report accompanying the agenda in mailings to Senators. Identifying various UCUI members present who could speak to the motion, she then turned over the floor to Mr. Downing as principal spokesperson for UCUI and its subcommittee. He, in turn, detailed the history of subcommittee work since February 1985 and indicated the persons with whom his group consulted as representatives of CUE, the affected departments (Rhetoric, Communications, and Journalism and Mathematical Sciences), the Summer Support program, and academic advisers. Explaining why UCUI had refrained from trying to classify any individual course on the basis of this research, he indicated that the subcommittee had devoted considerable discussion to studying the merits of identifying a cluster of pre-100-level skill courses that would carry something other than graduation credit and mentioned that they had derived benefit from looking into experiences at other Michigan universities?especially Western Michigan University. He emphasized that this motion should be considered within the general context of CUE recommendations.

Intense discussion ensued, with questions and remarks moving back and forth among six major topics, which will be separated below for easier comprehension: the population of students likely to be affected, the nature of the credits to be awarded, the desirability of figuring these credits into GPA, the preferability of numerically or letter-graded courses, departmental or University jurisdiction over such courses, and community college implications. Ms. Hart-Gonzalez Introduced the first of these topics by Inquiring what percentage of students take courses in this 000-level category; she coupled her query with others about the effect on MACRAO transfers in particular and about the tuition rate that would be charged. Mr. Kleckner, readily responding that the tuition rate for all courses would remain unchanged, anticipated little effect on transfer students; those transferring under MACRAO provisions would presumably be well beyond this particular class level. Other Senators had clearer information about probable numbers of students enrolling. Mr. Grossman reported that his department now teaches some 1600 students annually in its MTH 111-112 sequence, which would be a prime candidate for renumbering. Many students take both courses, so somewhat over half that total would probably serve as an estimate of mathematical enrollments. Ms. Hamilton indicated that the Summer Support program now takes students at that level, these persons being the primary population of some 000-level Rhetoric courses. She estimated that about 45 students a year take two such courses. A tiny handful take more. Students in these courses often make intensive gains in their reading and writing skills, spurred by the incentive of college credit. She deplored the absence of Ms. Garcia, who could offer powerful evidence of student appreciation for being admitted from the start as full-scale college students.

Mr. Chipman offered perspective from the Commission on University Excellence, separating the issue now confronting the Senate from the Academic Support Program. His commission's

ultimate concern was the growing tendency of students to be offering toward their degrees an increasing proportion of courses that are considered pre-college by the sponsoring departments. He thought Oakland University's current policy out of line with practices elsewhere in Michigan. Ms. Hamilton, on the other hand, maintained that we are dealing with a complex problem that extends into the community. She admitted teaching some "pre-college courses" but argued that the students are principally persons who can qualify for college work with some extra help. She worried that we might be numbering courses for political rather than pedagogical reasons. Mr. Downing responded that he and other sponsors of the proposed legislation recognize that Oakland is making a commitment to those students; no one wants to turn them away or discourage them, but UCUI recognizes that correction of deficiencies will require taking some extra time for graduation. In response to Mr. Herman's question about the precise number of students likely to fall into this new category, Mr. Kleckner promised to secure numbers by the next meeting. Most would presumably be in Mathematics, with a few in Rhetoric.

Several persons voiced bemusement over the notion of credits not applicable toward graduation. Ms. Hart-Gonzalez wondered how students advance if not gaining credits, to which Ms. Eberwein replied that they really do earn and amass credits. These serve for class standing, athletic eligibility, residence hall eligibility, and various rites of academic passage, and they count at graduation time as part of the total record; they may not, however, serve to meet minimum credit requirements in any program. They help to swell maximum credits. Mr. Kleckner encouraged his colleagues to think in terms of 124 credits as a minimum for students who arrive with adequate preparation; less well prepared students will take a little longer. Mr. Barthel suggested the metaphor of a prolonged senior year, though Mr. Horwitz wondered about various catalog requirements for sophomore or junior standing since students would be advancing to these levels on the basis of 000-level courses. Ms. Eberwein acknowledged the fuzziness but mentioned that conditions are equally fuzzy already.

When Mr. Burke voiced opposition to awarding college credit of any kind for such courses and wondered why UCUI proposed doing so, Mr. Kleckner mentioned the motivation of state funding, which has traditionally been allocated on the basis of credits. Mr. Downing wanted to avoid isolating students in some antechamber of the University and urged their early integration. Mr. Herman pointed out that federal financial aid support is also affected by credits, a major point that Ms. Hamilton deemed worthy of additional inquiry. She suggested remanding the issue to committee for further study, especially consultation with members of her department—a matter that Mr. Downing remembered had already been accomplished. With Ms. Hart-Gonzalez still puzzled by credits that do yet don't exist, Ms. Eberwein suggested thinking of degree requirements in terms of 124 or more credits at the 100-level or above. She mentioned that faculty members have no trouble thinking in terms of so many 300-level courses and could learn to work another category into calculations. In response to Ms. Hamilton's suggestion, she agreed that any issue can always be remanded to committee but assured the Senate that nothing had yet been said on the floor that had not been considered in advance by UCUI. Figuring that the Senate is free to vote the motion up or down next month, Ms. Tripp also opposed remanding—especially as the issues in contention had been addressed in the subcommittee report. Mr. Srodawa called attention to the fact that students often take one or more courses not ultimately counted toward graduation requirements; in this case, he commented, the misdirection occurred before the student's arrival at Oakland rather than afterward. Mr. Metzner cited the example of graduate students, who frequently take undergraduate courses to fill in background lacunae even though those courses do not count toward the graduate degree. As the UCUI subcommittee had gathered information about

similar policies already in effect for pre-college offerings elsewhere in Michigan, Mr. Downing cited the director of the Intellectual Skills Development Program at Western Michigan University, who reports that students feel satisfaction from gaining credits and moving along the academic continuum even though the credits they earn in "University credit" courses do not directly advance them toward graduation. Mr. Horwitz and Ms. Hart-Gonzalez suggested experimenting with variable-credit modules used elsewhere, but Mr. Downing said that his committee, after looking at the Michigan State University model, judged the system it now proposes more feasible. Dubbing partial assignment of credit for such courses a cop-out, Ms. Tripp maintained that the real question is one of giving college credit of any sort for non-college work. She doubted that affected students would generally be deficient in all areas and thought it unlikely that passage of the motion would create an underclass of student.

Another thorny issue, first launched by Mr. Cardimen, turned out to be the question of whether or not to include credits for 000-numbered courses in the GPA. Mr. Downing justified inclusion of these courses on the theory that numerical grades would heighten a student's commitment of intellectual energy. He pointed out that the University would be awarding credits for these courses and that a student would be in a position to make demonstrable progress. Including grades in the GPA would also help the student with financial aid and athletic eligibility. Ms. Hamilton declared it patently unfair to ask students to work as hard as they do in such courses while not counting credits toward graduation but nonetheless averaging grades, which might be low ones, into the permanent academic record. Mr. Grossman doubted the effect would be deleterious in Math courses, where, unlike Rhetoric, grades tend to be higher in the lowest-level courses. Ms. Feingold, admitting to a severe problem with the idea of factoring these grades into the GPA, suggested grading all 000-level courses on an S/U basis, which would leave the GPA to reflect the student's average accomplishment in college-level work. Mr. Downing, thinking in terms of financial aid eligibility, saw no problem with S/U grading but apprehended trouble if numerical grades should be awarded in these courses only to be excluded from the GPA. Mr. Barthel thought a bookkeeping method might be adopted by which two sets of books would exist: one recording a person's progress as a student and the other the person's progress toward graduation. Mr. Downing thought that the compromise embodied in the current motion offered the advantage of avoiding just that sort of bookkeeping, analogous to the old GPA/API enigma.

Discussion of the GPA issue blurred inevitably into debate on the relative merits of letter and numerical grades, a somewhat murky issue as the Rhetoric courses now offered at the basic level are numerically graded while the Mathematics courses most likely to be reclassified use numerical indices of achievement. Although Mr. Kleckner pointed out that nothing in the motion would prohibit either department from continuing to offer the courses in their habitual way, various members of the Senate argued with some fervor for and against either option. Mr. Chipman wondered how the University could hope to measure a student's progress without assigning a grade, but Ms. Feingold indicated that an S or a U differs substantially from no grade at all even while keeping the record of such courses out of the GPA. Mr. Grossman noted that the principal national organization of Mathematics professors advises that numerical grades be assigned in pre-college courses and included in GPAs. Both Ms. Tripp and Mr. Chipman worried about loss of motivation; their experience has been that students tend to work a bit harder when aiming at numerical grades. Impressed by Ms. Hamilton's previous statement about student progress in basic writing and reading courses, Ms. Hart-Gonzalez suspected that students might want numerical recognition for their achievement. Mr. Herman commented that he would feel uncomfortable in moving further on this issue without advice from Summer Support people, and Mr. Kleckner promised to have someone representing that

program at the next meeting. Mr. Bertocci reasoned that a numerical grade might offer students some useful feedback on their survival prospects in other courses. In response to Mr. Barthel's suggestion that the University as a whole might establish a mandatory S/U grading policy in 000-level courses, Mr. Grossman asserted that such decisions are best left to departments. Although sympathetic to arguments on both sides of the issue, Mr. Downing thought it inappropriate for either UCUI or the Senate to tell any department how to grade its own courses.

Questions about where policy-making authority should reside came up in various forms. Mr. Copenhaver suggested that the Rhetoric faculty, if dismayed by loss of graduation credit for courses they think should carry it, might consider renumbering its current 000-level courses upward. Ms. Hart-Gonzalez, however, noted that a department cannot renumber courses unilaterally. Ms. Hamilton responded that her colleagues are indisposed to renumber these courses (an alternative Mr. Downing indicated UCUI members had considered feasible in some cases) but Insisted on the University's commitment to work encouragingly with these students. Discussion of renumbering authority led Mr. Appleton to speculate that such decisions would require approval from committees on instruction within the affected schools. The legislation stipulates, however, that final approval of any such reclassifications, either upward or downward, must be approved by UCUI. Ms. Feingold then inquired about plans for Rhetoric 103 and 105, which had been recommended by the CUE report for reclassification but are not affected by the legislation on the floor. She wondered how many students now enroll in these options. Ms. Hamilton provided her with an estimate but reported that her colleagues in Rhetoric, Communications, and Journalism are indisposed to request renumbering of these courses that serve a diverse and often advanced student population.

Thinking that UCUI ought to be initiating some reclassifications instead of waiting for departmental prompting, Ms. Feingold wondered what other courses now offered for 100-level credit might be considered for renumbering. Mr. Downing noted that nine 000-level courses now exist, all within Rhetoric, and that the Mathematics Department is likely to propose some additions; members of UCUI anticipate no other such requests within the immediate future but recognize that the day may come when the most basic computer science course might be renumbered downward. Reporting that his own initial aversion to the policy change embodied in the current motion had been greatly modified by the very fact of UCUI's leaving initiation of such change to departmental choice, Mr. Copenhaver declared himself favorably impressed by the mathematicians' study of their departmental position on this issue and by the studies undertaken nationally by their professional association. Such departmental authority seemed to him to embody the basic principle of a university. Mr. Eberwein expressed curiosity, however, about the sentence in the subcommittee report that disavowed any intention by UCUI to Initiate reclassifications "until and unless" the University-wide review of policy regarding basic skills offerings that was recommended by CUE Is accomplished. He wondered what might be entailed in the aftermath of such a study. Mr. Downing responded that, if such a global review is implemented and if the body conducting it should recommend renumbering of any courses to the 000 level, UCUI would feel obligated to act upon its recommendations. Mr. Kleckner reminded his colleagues that, if this legislation passes, not one course?not one?need be renumbered.

The other issue drawing sustained attention concerned community college relationships. Mr. Diltz wondered whether this legislation might not simply encourage a student to take courses at a community college, though Mr. Kleckner pointed out that a course deemed by our faculty equivalent to one of our 000-level offerings would transfer from any other institution at the

same level. This colloquy reminded Ms. Hamilton of experienced non-correspondence between supposedly equivalent courses. Her department has discovered that students who transfer two writing courses from local community colleges to establish their writing proficiency often perform less well in subsequent Oakland courses than those who honed their writing talents in our Rhetoric program. She recommended turning attention from credit in basic skills courses to the much larger issue of introducing a junior-level writing requirement analogous to the one long established at Wayne State. Mr. Kleckner considered that a separable issue, one to be addressed by a soon-to-be-appointed committee. Mr. Appleton raised a murky problem with implementation of the proposed motion in terms of current policy restrictions against a student's transferring either credits or course equivalency from a two-year institution after amassing 62 credits. He noted that MTH 111-112 requirements have often been satisfied in this way and wondered whether the motion would alter this practice. Both Mr. Kleckner and Ms. Eberwein assumed that the 62-credit rule would be unaffected; after reaching junior status, a student is not to advance toward graduation by way of junior-college study. Ms. Terry, however, noted that advisers now tend to allow such use of math course equivalents, although not for credit. Mr. Grossman didn't consider meeting a prerequisite for a course as "a degree requirement" and thought that his colleagues in Mathematics would continue accepting transfer equivalents of MTH 111-112 as prerequisites for courses students would then have to pass here. Begging the Senate for guidance, Mr. Appleton apprehended problems in communicating the effect of this new legislation to community colleges. Mr. Kleckner asked UCUI to consider this implication of creating a new kind of course, although Ms. Tripp saw no application of the question to the measure at hand.

Bringing discussion of the proposal to completion for the day, Mr. Appleton proposed an amendment (seconded by Ms. Hamilton) to move the implementation date ahead from the 1987-88 academic year to 1989-90. This move responds to community college unhappiness with the inadequate phase-in time allowed for our new general education program. Alerted by delays in implementing that program, he anticipated that considerable time would expire between Senate action on this motion and actual departmental and UCUI decisions on course numbering. He wanted to provide a minimal two-year lead time for advisers at our feeder schools. Mr. Horwitz and Ms. Chapman-Moore, similarly sobered by this year's communication snafus with external publics, enthusiastically concurred.

With plans to renew discussion of the UCUI proposal at the December meeting, Senators turned their attention to private initiatives for the good of the order. Mr. Carbone expressed concern about inadequate passing time between classes. Eight minutes often prove too few to get from one classroom building on campus to another, especially for handicapped persons and those temporarily disabled by ice, snow, and wind. He recognized that Veterans' Administration regulations require a specific number of class minutes each week but hoped a longer interval could be freed for passage. Mr. Kleckner pledged to refer the matter to the Registrar for study, noting that the effect would presumably be to extend the academic day. Ms. Hart-Gonzalez reminded those who would consider this issue that any extension of the day should be coordinated with child-care provisions.

Moving ahead to information items, Mr. Kleckner announced the Steering Committee's formation of an *Ad Hoc* Committee on Emeritus Faculty Rank, to be chaired by the ever-faithful and still industrious George Matthews. He pointed out the committee's charge and membership on the agenda and expressed hope that the group would be able to bring a proposal to the Senate within this academic year.

He then turned his attention to recent experiences with a citizen watchdog group called Accuracy in Academia, which is investigating charges of political bias against several Oakland University faculty members. Mr. Kleckner deplored the publicity that has been achieved by this group, now only a few months old, and regretted that inordinate press attention has been focused on Oakland University. Commending the individuals concerned on the ways in which they have handled this problem, he cautioned his Senate colleagues that we must deal carefully with this group and respond thoughtfully to any threat to academic freedom. He noted that the AAUP has revived its Committee A to deal with the current challenge to our professional values and announced that Committee A would be cooperating with the Honors College and the University Congress in sponsoring a public forum on academic freedom. When Ms. Blankenship inquired whether we have reason to believe that University students actually turned in one or more names to the AIA Washington office or whether we were, instead, targeted by the group, Mr. Bertocci reported that AIA has confirmed receiving such reports from Oakland students. Mr. Srodawa then asked whether the University has a policy regarding attendance of unregistered persons in classes. According to Mr. Kleckner, the policy is to leave decisions about what visitors may be admitted to the instructor's discretion. Nobody is required to admit outsiders to the classroom, but a public institution has obligations to make information available about its courses. Syllabi and such materials can be subpoenaed for public inspection. On this sobering note, the Senate adjourned at 4:47 p.m., upon motion of Mr. Diltz.

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

Back to

OAKLAND UNIVERSITY

S E N A T E

Home Page