



OAKLAND UNIVERSITY SENATE

OAKLAND UNIVERSITY SENATE

Thursday, January 12, 1984
Fourth Meeting
128, 129, 130 Oakland Center

MINUTES

Senators Present: Barthel, Bertocci, Boulos, Burke, Chagnon-Royce, Chapman-Moore, Chipman, Copenhaver, Downing, Easterly, J. Eberwein, R. Eberwein, Edgerton, Eliezer, Evans, Feeman, Frankie, Gerulaitis, Grossman, Hamilton, Ketchum, Kleckner, Lindell, Maloney, McCabe, McClory, Moore, Moorhouse, Sakai, Scherer, Schimmelman, Schwartz, Sevilla, Snider-Feldmesser, Splete, Stevens, Titus, Tombouljian, Tracy, Workman
Senators Absent: Appleton, Brown, Bledsoe, Champagne, Christina, Coppola, Federlein, Hammerle, Hartman, Heubel, Horwitz, Hough, Howes, Pine, Russell, Shichi, Windeknecht, Witt, Zorn

SUMMARY OF ACTIONS

1. Minutes of December 8, 1983: Moved, Ms. Titus; seconded, Mr. Grossman. Approved as corrected.
2. Motion from the Committee on General Education to establish a new University-wide General Education program. Moved, Ms. Tripp; seconded, Ms. Gerulaitis. Approved.
3. Motion from the Steering Committee to modify graduation requirements by rescinding the specification of eight credits of genuinely free electives. Moved, Ms. Boulos; seconded, Mr. Copenhaver. Approved.
4. Motion from the University Committee on Undergraduate Instruction and the Academic Standing and Honors Committee to revise the undergraduate grading system. Moved, Ms. Eberwein; seconded, Ms. Boulos. First reading.
5. Good and welfare suggestion by Mr. Stevens to separate smoking and non-smoking sections at future Senate meetings. To be implemented on an experimental basis.

Mr. Kleckner called the meeting to order promptly at 3:10 p.m., proceeding at once to consideration of the minutes of December 8, 1983 (Moved, Ms. Titus; seconded, Mr. Grossman). Mr. Moorhouse requested that the introductory sentence of paragraph three on page five be deleted from the record as he felt it misrepresented the tone of his remarks. He had been concerned about basic skills but had neither felt nor voiced alarm. Thus modified, the minutes were approved. Attention turned at once to the first item of old business on the agenda, the motion from the Committee on General Education to establish a new University-wide General Education program (Moved, Ms. Tripp; seconded, Ms. Gerulaitis):

MOVED that all undergraduate students be required to complete at least 32 credits in General Education with at least one course taken in each of eight field categories;

and that the following stipulations apply: a. that the field categories be specified as:

1. Arts
2. Literature
3. Language
4. Western Civilization
5. International Studies
6. Social Science
7. Mathematics, Logic, and Computer Science
8. Natural Science and Technology;

b. that each field category contain a limited number of courses, to be approved by the University Committee on General Education;

c. that the 32 credits of General Education be considered a minimum credit requirement which academic units may increase for their own students;

d. that this requirement be binding on all incoming students starting in the fall semester of 1985; except

e. that students from Michigan community colleges who enroll there before the fall of 1984 and enroll at Oakland University before the fall of 1986 with more than 30 accepted transfer credits be allowed to choose to meet the earlier General Education requirement as presented in the 1984-85 Undergraduate Catalog.

Having discussed this motion in considerable detail at the December meeting. Senators had no remaining questions or concerns to raise. The motion carried by a loud voice vote, followed by applause. Mr. Kleckner noted that the applause was well deserved; both the committee that sponsored this proposal and a previous one have spent much time and effort getting us to this point. This action restores a University-wide General Education system to Oakland University for the first time since 1972 and does so with a stronger academic program than was eliminated at that time. He considered this decision a positive and historic one for the University. A concurrent motion from the Steering Committee to modify graduation requirements in a way that would free up curricular space for the new General Education program (Moved, Ms. Boulos; seconded, Mr. Copenhaver) likewise passed without comment or dissent:

MOVED that the requirement that every student must present at least eight credits of genuinely free electives as a condition for graduation be repealed. This action concluded the old business and allowed attention to turn to projected changes in grading policy.

Ms. Eberwein, seconded by Ms. Boulos, proposed the following action on behalf of the University Committee on Undergraduate Instruction and the Academic Standing and Honors Committee:

MOVED that for undergraduate students:

a. the grade N be eliminated for numerically-graded courses and replaced by the grade 0.0, which grade will carry no credit, will enter into the grade point average,

and will appear on the academic transcript;

b. the grade N be eliminated for S/N-graded courses and replaced by the grade U (unsatisfactory), which grade will carry no credit or numerical equivalent and will appear on the academic transcript;

c. the grades WS and WN be eliminated;

d. the P grade, if not removed within a calendar year of its assignment, be changed to a numeric grade of 0.0;

e. the period for granting the W (withdrawal without assessment of progress) grade be extended to nine weeks in fourteen-week courses and to five weeks in seven-week courses;

f. in the case of severe hardship beyond the control of a student which occurs after the cut-off date for use of the W grade and which prevents the student from completing course requirements, the I (incomplete) grade be utilized;

g. completion of work to remove an I grade is to be accomplished during the first four weeks of the next semester (Fall or Winter) for which a student registers, unless an extension is requested by the student and approved by the instructor and the dean of the appropriate School or College. The I shall be changed to a grade of 0.0 at the end of that semester if the work has not been completed. If more than three terms intervene before the student next registers at Oakland University, the I shall be changed to a grade of 0.0; and

h. the effective date for implementing these changes shall be September 1, 1984.

Ms. Eberwein then turned over the floor to Mr. Evarts, who returned from his sabbatical leave to explain this proposal; he chaired the Academic Standing and Honors Committee last year, when it was working on this recommendation. A previous version of such legislation from the same committee had, two years ago, been referred by the Senate to UCUI, which collaborated with Academic Standing and Honors to develop the motion now on the floor. He pointed out that a recommendation to replace the N grade with a 0.0 has been with us in one form or another for at least three years, with two Senate committees collaborating over the last year and a half to formulate this proposal in a way that eliminates all reference to N grades by instituting a 0.0 grade, restoring the S/U distinction, ending WS and WN options, and extending both the withdrawal period and the period of I-grade eligibility. The greatest benefit to be expected from the new policy would be the elimination of the academic progress index (API) as a sort of hidden parallel to the familiar grade point average (GPA). Students who concentrate only on their GPAs often develop misleadingly optimistic views of their academic progress, not realizing that the Ns they have been accumulating count on the API and render them liable to probation or dismissal. Violation of N-grade policy, Mr. Evarts reminded his colleagues, is the single most common reason for academic disaster at Oakland University. This motion is designed to simplify the existing situation and to provide a more accurate index of student progress.

Mr. Burke initiated discussion by observing that he still considered an N grade adequately

descriptive of student performance. He suspected that the student typically ending a course with an N is one who more or less stops trying at some point in the semester or who ceases to attend. Since such a person cannot really fail at an endeavor he or she never truly attempted, a statement of no progress on the record would be more accurate than one of failure. Mr. Chipman felt that the current N grade provides an altogether too tempting alternative to hard work. Students, thinking that they forfeit nothing by ceasing to make an effort, find it comfortable to pull out of a course rather than working harder or seeking help. If a person recognized the likelihood of a 0.0 on a transcript, he or she might put in the effort necessary to earn a modestly better grade?possibly the 1.5 or 1.2 that Mr. Downing finds some students now accept less willingly than an N even though it advances them toward graduation.

Considerable attention focused on the plight of such academic loafers under the proposed system. Mr. Evarts pointed out that the extended period in which a person could withdraw from the University without academic penalty was intended as a sort of compromise for students who decide to pull out after discovering that a course proves too difficult. The W exacts only a financial penalty. Students will still be able to accumulate Ws | without prejudice to the GPA, just as they can do now. When Mr. Grossman inquired about the appearance of W grades on the transcript, he learned from the Provost that they appear now and still will; the only way a student can make sure a course never appears on the transcript is to drop it in the first two weeks. Ms. Chapman-Moore expressed concerns about a different kind of academic penalty connected with W grades. It is her experience that the Registrar counts a course thus terminated as one of a student's limited legal attempts. Mr. Kleckner promised to look into that interpretation of Senate policy, and Mr. Tomboulion suggested that this body inform the Registrar that a W should not be counted as a failed attempt.

Mr. Chipman wondered why the committees chose to extend the W grade beyond the halfway point of each term. Mr. Evarts justified the decision as a compromise intended to relieve the burden imposed by removing WS, WN, and N escape valves for the student who has accomplished little or nothing. The other escape valve, the extended I-grade period, benefits different students: those who decide to make a real try at finishing a course after experiencing difficulty as well as those who encounter disabling hardships toward the end of the term. Mr. Downing called for more discussion of why it is beneficial to allow a student to go nine weeks into a course before deciding whether to commit himself or herself to its completion. He suspected that seven weeks would be sufficient for this purpose. Ms. Easterly's memory of student commentary at last year's open hearings on this proposal was that students felt concern about getting back their midterm grades in time to make an informed decision. This point reminded Mr. Chipman that the Senate had already dealt in another way with the problem of late information about academic standing by passing a regulation requiring a faculty member to provide each student with some index of progress by the seventh week. As Messrs. Feeman and Kleckner pointed out, however, that policy applies only in 100-level courses. Mr. Grossman wondered when official enrollments would be counted and learned from Messrs. Kleckner and Beardslee that such figures are tabulated in the first few weeks of each term; students who withdraw, after seven weeks or nine, would still count as enrollments for official computations.

When Mr. Eberwein inquired why it was necessary to eliminate WS and WN grades, Mr. Evarts explained that his committee began with the assumption that, to make the new system work, it is necessary to expunge all references to N. If the WN goes, the WS probably should also.

Several people spoke in favor of replacing the N with a 0.0 grade. According to Ms. Chapman-Moore, students currently exist in ignorance of the API and have no their N grades are hurting them until they are startled by a dismissal notice. She thought this proposal would help them to assess their progress better. This, according to Ms. Easterly, was the anticipation of students who attended last year's hearings. They considered the new system harder but fairer and thought it would encourage people to plan their programs more realistically.

The only explicit regret expressed over this proposal came from Mr. Stevens, though he reported himself resigned to the change. He recalled his pleasure, back in the 1960s, at the dismantling of punitive traditional rules and worried that this motion represented a step backward for student flexibility. He also wondered why the committees involved in suggesting changes in the current grading system had taken no steps to clarify or simplify the numerical system now in use and inquired whether he might be the only member of the faculty incapable of distinguishing between a 2.5 and a 2.6. Apparently not, as Mr. Copenhagen joined him in asking, out of admittedly morbid curiosity, how the committee dealt with tenth-of-a-point grading discriminations. Mr. Evarts confessed that his committee had not discussed that issue, preferring to leave its mysteries for another day. Mr. Feeman observed that the Academic Standing and Honors Committee deals only with the lower end of the grading spectrum but thought that UCUI might have taken a more general view. Mr. Kleckner recalled that, when a version of this proposal first reached the Senate, it had allowed grades in the 0.1 to 0.9 range, much to the displeasure of the senators then sitting.

Considerable attention focused on the probable impacts of this proposal on various groups of students. It would be felt even by persons who never accumulated enough Ns to call their attention to the API. Their GPAs would henceforth reflect even one failing grade. Mr. Kleckner observed, however, that every N counts even now on the API, and it is that register that determines continuation in the University. When Mr. Sevilla ' inquired whether anyone had estimated the overall lowering effect of this proposal on ; the average Oakland University GPA or had given any thought to how external bodies might be expected to interpret a more rigorously defined GPA, he learned that the Academic Standing and Honors Committee had looked only at the impact of such changes on code 2 and 3 students, thereby casting a jaded view on the overall scene. Mr. Beardslee, however, had studied the impact of the earlier change to the current system with its admittedly inflated GPA. He cautioned that reversing the direction of change would probably not result in symmetric variation, as students with more incentive to try will predictably earn somewhat fewer 0.0s than Ns. He anticipated greater discrepancy in grades between freshmen and seniors and a more dramatic male/female variation. It is his conjecture that the change will have little effect on students with averages of 3.5 and above (the group most likely to aspire to graduate school) but will put extra pressure on the students most likely to attract attention from the Academic Standing and Honors Committee. These people will find it steep going to pull back to a respectable , GPA after two or three 0.0s.

Mr. Maloney wondered about the impact of this system on disadvantaged students and learned from Mr. Evarts that his committee intended to monitor that question closely. At present, the University retains 60% of its summer support students for at least two years. Ms. Chapman-Moore, thinking that the proposed system still allowed for 0.1 to 0.9 grades, thought it might actually help some weak students by giving credit even for degrees of failure but learned that no such grade options are proposed. The only way the new system could enhance anyone's GPA, according to the Provost, is if it encourages improved behavior; otherwise the new GPA will be identical to the old API. When Mr. Maloney inquired whether the only reason for

dismissal now after the first year is accumulation of five Ns, he learned from Mr. Evarts and Mr. Kleckner that other kinds of inadequate performance could lead to the same disaster. Accumulation of five 1.0 grades would also exhibit unsatisfactory performance. A query from Mr. Splete, however, reminded the Senate that nothing in this legislation affects the standing policy that allows a person to repeat a course and count only the higher grade in the GPA even though all weaker attempts would still appear on the transcript with only the grade blacked out.

Ms. Chagnon-Royce asked whether this change in grading is consistent with policies at other universities. She wondered how an Oakland University transcript would be viewed under the new dispensation. Mr. Tracy reported knowledge of two universities that already switch an N from here to a 0.0 when reviewing transcripts. He felt that truth in advertising justified this change and found it ironic that an N now hurts a student less than a low passing grade.

Another concern about consistency was raised by Mr. Tomboulion, who inquired about possible confusion between the undergraduate and graduate grading systems?especially in those courses that mix both populations. Mr. Evarts, admitting that his committee had conducted no study of the graduate grading system, felt that different systems of grading reflected attempts to distinguish different expectations about the kind and quality of work. Mr. Feeman encouraged the Senate to look for improved correlation between the two systems, though no perfect harmony, once the Graduate Council completes its review of the graduate grading system?one that varies from the undergraduate, Mr. Kleckner pointed out, in large part because the graduate student takes fewer courses and needs a different measure of academic progress. WS and WN grades are, even now, unavailable to graduate students. With curiosity satisfied, at least for the moment, the Senate then turned from reflection on the thorny issue of grading to consider its own Good and Welfare.

Mr. Stevens established his place in history as the first member of the current Senate to offer a private resolution for the general good. Commemorating the twentieth anniversary of the Surgeon General's report on smoking and health, he called for return to a division of Senate seating between smoking and non-smoking sections. Ms. Titus advocated the yet more radical step of prohibiting smoking altogether for meetings that seldom last more than two hours. Mr. Kleckner, attempting to avoid a formal vote on this issue (one of the most controversial in Senate records) suggested dividing the room informally at the next several meetings by a sort of gentleman's agreement. Mr. McClory then contributed to the good of the order by informing his fellow-Senators that the University Congress is reviewing student membership on Senate committees and asks the cooperation of committee chairs in providing information.

Different kinds of information came from Mr. Kleckner, who reported on several developments of interest to the Senate. Mr. Matthews is now working intensively on plans for a two-month anniversary celebration next fall with three components: a series of seminars featuring major outside speakers discussing the various academic thrusts of the University and suggesting its direction for the next twenty-five years; a review of what people expected of Oakland University twenty-five years ago, featuring visits from some founding members; and a program of recreational diversions. The development campaign, now in its preliminary stages, is likely to be launched officially at that time.

Budget projections for next year remain hazy at the moment, given the turmoil in Lansing following recall elections. It seems likely however, that the governor's budget may contain

relatively significant funding for education, though not to the extent of promising much actual new money. The university has now arrived at an insurance settlement on the Meadow Brook barns that burned over the summer. The money must be spent within two years and must be used on structures that roughly replace those lost. It cannot be spent on a library extension but can be devoted somewhat creatively to East Campus improvement. Construction may be expected to begin next spring on a golf course barn and a single barn next to the riding ring, the latter functioning as part of a restored riding ring complex including a multi-purpose facility for assemblies, exhibits, and Professor Stransky's health maintenance program. When Mr. McCabe inquired what constraints existed on the University's freedom to spend this money differently, he was told by Mr. Kleckner that these are the terms of the insurance policy.

Having assimilated so much information and concluded its deliberations for the day, the Senate adjourned at 4:19 p.m., upon Ms. Titus motion.

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

Back to

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SENATE

Home Page