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Scholastic Committee

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Scholastic Committee 2011–12, Meeting #22

University of Minnesota, Morris

May 2, 2012

Present: Michelle Page, chair, Chad Braegelman, Luciana Ranelli, Peh Ng, Peter Wyckoff, Hilda Ladner, Dennis Stewart, Jennifer Zych-Herrmann, Tammy Berberi, Erin Christensen, Allison Wolf, Clare Dingley, Steve Gross, Judy Korn, executive staff, Absent: Holly Gruntner, Dillon McBrady

1. Approved April 25, 2012, minutes

2. Retention report follow-up discussion

Herrmann shared that there was a poor response range from faculty with the old system. Took an extreme approach with the new Morris Academic Alert system. Introducing logical survey times has increased response, but adds to faculty responsibility. In addition, if no response is received, it is not clear if that means the student is doing fine or the faculty member has not responded. Seeking the right balance.

Comments and concerns were voiced about “stigmatizing” the student because the alert no longer comes from a professor. Someone else has been told about the student’s academic situation and is contacting him/her. The situation is taken outside of the relationship of faculty and student. It doesn’t feel like an academic process anymore. The student has been “turned in.” People who are not in a student’s academic life contact him/her. Under the old system, the alert came from the faculty. Herrmann clarified that the Morris Academic Alert system only serves as an intermediary that delivers the faculty comments to the students and informs the Alert Team, just as was the case with our former Academic Alert System.

The Midterm Alert system still exists, and it allows faculty to contact students. Midterm Alert was timed so that students could make judgements about dropping classes before the deadline. A member remarked that we’ve taken a “sidestep” away from this focus on the add/drop deadlines with Morris Academic Alert. Herrmann disagreed, saying that the Morris Academic Alert system is available at all times plus added intentional requests for faculty feedback at the beginning, middle and end of the semester in an attempt to give more students early feedback.

The two alert systems can be confusing. Faculty don’t know when to use one system or the other. This is why one system, Morris Academic Alert, has been encouraged this year.

Morris Academic Alert should be a “back up” to the faculty/student relationship and is not intended to replace the normal communication and feedback systems that should exist between faculty and their students. If an acute situation arises, if the faculty member is aware of an issue that is outside of their expertise or comfort level, or there is a breakdown in communication between the faculty member and a student, the Academic Alert system supports the faculty.

Moodle is also an option for reaching students about academic progress.

Morris Academic Alert provides a paper trail.

There are plans for the new system to be automated by next academic year, so messages will appear as a direct faculty communication. Faculty awareness and training will be a necessity if we move to this automated delivery of alerts, a task that has historically been a challenge.

A committee member commented that sometimes choices can be confusing. If faculty are going to use a system, it needs to be faculty friendly. Most faculty will need to be “bugged,” and the process should be incredibly easy.

It was noted that the option to choose several students at once to say they are fine was a huge improvement to the system.

The campus has explored systems for student self reporting. A certain percentage of students might be helped in an easy automated way. Other colleges allow parents and students to use the system. At Morris, Community Advisers (CA) can use the system. Morris’s Academic Alert system could be expanded to include a student module.

It was asked how to handle the group in between “those who struggle” and “those who are doing fine”--those who are struggling but the faculty is working with the students. The “alert person” from the discipline should be notified but with the absence of faculty involvement in administering Morris Academic Alert or serving on the Alert Team it is unclear who this “alert person” might be. The ideal of faculty “champions” in each discipline has come up in the past and in the context of this discussion. It has been suggested that perhaps the faculty alert role is one that could be assumed by the Master Advisers.

Hermann shared that there was a system push [information and training sessions] at the beginning of the academic year as the campus transitioned to a new system. Training sessions were offered. Many were not able to attend a training session, and she did a lot of one-on-one training. Faculty should be empowered to use the system. Training is ongoing.

3. Policy changes and communication

The need for good communication about Academic Alert led the committee into a discussion of the broader issue of communication on campus. A good mechanism is needed. The Dean's office no longer has detailed orientation and no longer provides a handbook.

The discipline coordinator has no support and no real job description to provide this type of service.

The changes have affected not just the new people on campus but also those who have been here for awhile. There should be an annual place and opportunity for training.

It was shared that the Dean has asked the Consultative Committee for feedback on how a campus plan for orienting new faculty might be developed. The details have not been decided, but it might include mentoring, a checklist that should be completed over the course of a year, and brown bag events to talk about policies, etc. The program will be geared to incoming faculty members, but all will be invited.

Training should be mandatory, but also flexible, such as backup online opportunities, and it also needs to be recorded.

It was noted that University Relations has had an increased external emphasis in the past years, and internal communication has been diminished.

People have to feel engaged in the community in order to be motivated to attempt learning all the information and seeking it out. "One size fits all" doesn't work at Morris. Communication is a two-way process. One member commented that it might be more of an issue of volume versus lack of communication. We are expected to have knowledge and expertise on so many matters. Another member suggested that a central repository of information could help us organize the information we are responsible for and give us the ability to access it when it is relevant.

4. SCEP subcommittee on contextualization of the transcript

Last SCEP meeting coming up for Ng. Nic McPhee will be the new representative.

Discussed "contextualization of the transcript" and various methods that SCEP has considered. Some institutions are "brutal" with the information they provide, but Duke, for example, has "pulled out" of this type of method. SCEP is currently considering providing the percentile range of groups in that particular section with individual students' grades.

Contextualization is being discussed because of grade disparity. "What does an A mean if everyone is receiving an A?" The "audience" for this information would be employers and graduate programs.

A number of "cons" were expressed by the committee. It provides ranking relative to the class. The information could be hard to understand for nonacademic people or those not experienced in reading a transcript, and the information could hurt students. Standardized tests are not reported as a range, but rather as a percentile.

Need contextualization of the grades, but percentile might not be the correct approach. Median/average grades might be better. But, not everyone understands the difference between median and average.

This approach to transcripts "takes away faculty control." For example, some faculty hope to give every student an A in a research seminar in which students are completing rigorous, strenuous work.

Faculty employ different grading procedures. One professor may start with the grade of 0 and add points, while another may start with 100 and subtract points.

The Faculty Consultative Committee will address this topic next year.

5. Repeat courses

The Registrar informed the committee on the discussion topic of averaging grades for repeat courses. Monitoring of repeat courses is not conducted, although the policy states one repeat. Currently, the last grade for the course is the replacement grade and prior grades are deleted. The committee voiced no support for the averaging of grades.

6. Incomplete form/contract

The Registrar reviewed the Crookston Agreement for Granting an Incomplete form with the committee. The Crookston form lends itself to email communication emphasizing the agreement between the student and faculty. It also emphasizes that it is the faculty's decision to grant an incomplete. Students request an incomplete. Faculty grants it. Even if the faculty person leaves, this form will be on file. The committee was reminded that an email from a University account is considered a signature. The form reflects the current policy. The committee is in support of a new electronic form for the Morris campus.

Respectfully submitted,

Judy Korn
Executive staff