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MINUTES-1998-99 CURRICULUM COMMITTEE MEETING #08

February 3, 1999; 8:00 a.m.; Behmler Conference Room

Present: Cerar, Farrell, Frenier, Haugen, Korth, Lee, McIntosh, Neuharth, Taylor, Utoft

Absent: Busch, Kissock, Leroux, Thielke, Woll

Guests: Mooney

[In these minutes: GER designation of topics courses by division chairs; policy on students grading students.]

APPROVAL OF MINUTES: Korth asked for additions or corrections to the previous minutes. There were none, so minutes were approved by a voice vote.

VOTE: Unanimous in favor (8-0-0)

GER DESIGNATION OF TOPICS COURSES BY DIVISION CHAIRS (REVISITED): Korth commented that he would like the Curriculum Committee to return to this topic that was addressed at the end of the last CC meeting. Korth mentioned that he had been thinking some more about the issue and wonders if the CC had been a little hasty in adopting the policy of empowering division chairs to assign the GER Designation on specific topics courses. He questioned whether the provisional approval process by Dean and the division chairs which was also voted in at the last meeting would be adequate. He stated that the provisional approval would be for one-time changes in the curriculum, but he wondered if the CC had gone too far in implementing the GER topics policy. The approval by a single division chair would take away the campus wide review since the Campus Assembly would not be giving approval.

[Taylor arrived at this point.]

Frenier wondered if the designation were assigned, would it be permanent? Korth stated that it would be approved for a one time-offering only. It would have to come to the CC for permanent approval.

Farrell said he understood disciplines could offer any specific topics under a variable topics umbrella without coming to the CC for approval. Mooney said this issue is only in regard to assigning the GER designation or to add an Honors designation to a topics course when the umbrella course does not carry the designation.

Korth stated that the CC had adopted a motion at the last meeting that would allow the division chair to assign the GER category for a course under a variable topics umbrella. Lee wondered if in the former process the umbrella course did have a GER designation and the course under this umbrella didn't vary from the topic, wouldn't that GER designation be fine? Korth agreed that would be fine and said most topics courses did have a GER assigned to them. Mooney clarified that the specific topic could not deviate from the overall heading. She also stated that there are more courses than one would assume that state, "See specific topics for general education categories."

Lee felt that Korth had a valid point regarding the lack of campus-wide review. He said different courses rarely come up. Mooney said if the umbrella course has the designation, it is rare for the specific topic to be different, but for courses without a designation there is much variation. Lee feels the CC should encourage all divisions to be certain the umbrella courses have a designation. Mooney said this allows for courses such as environmental courses that UMM is short in. Korth said the purpose is to offer flexibility in the curriculum. It provides an opportunity to make changes quickly. One-time approval gives flexibility. Lee wondered if the CC should still allow for one-time approval. Korth suggested a modified form for one-time approval that gives the provisional approval option and then the regular approval process where Campus Assembly authorizes the change.

Farrell agreed. He feels an option for a provisional approval would be helpful, but if it keeps happening he would have a serious conversation to prevent it from occurring with much frequency. He would recommend a one-time approval and then think seriously about making it permanent.

Korth suggested a form for provisional approval that would then be forwarded to Campus Assembly for regular approval. Mooney said the first offering could be experimental and then possibly something different could be proposed for the permanent offering.

Korth wondered what the CC would like to do, delay implementation of variable topics approval mechanism, or postpone the discussion until the CC can see the provisional document. Lee wondered if the provisional form would require approval of all the division chairs and the dean? Korth said the form says the dean with the concurrence of the division chairs. He assumes the dean would consult with the chairs. This process would be

parallel to the process used by University College.

MOTION: (McIntosh, Frenier) To rescind the last motion regarding the GER designation of variable topics courses by division chairs and to incorporate that designation into the provisional approval process.

Frenier wondered if this could be done by incorporating something into the old form. Korth assured her that it would be included on the old Form C.

VOTE: Unanimous in favor (9-0-0)

POLICY ON STUDENTS GRADING STUDENTS: Korth mentioned that this issue was first introduced last year and is as yet not well-defined. He is not sure where or if the CC would like to go with this issue. Lee requested a definition for "students grading students." He wondered what grading this would include? Korth added a question about what limits should be considered. He wondered if there was a perception of a problem at UMM.

Farrell requested a review of what the sum and substance was of last year's discussion. Korth stated there had not been enough discussion to summarize. Mooney commented that the discussion arose from a separate discussion regarding whether there should be a designation of courses with TAs in the catalog.

Lee pointed out that there are various ways to use TAs for grading. Farrell agreed and said he saw three different issues: the issue of any grading by a TA; any grading that requires judgment; or students' privacy issues. He pointed out that faculty are not to place graded exams in a public place for privacy reasons.

Lee mentioned that it is not uncommon for a TA to conduct a session and assign work where he or she grades the work. This grading is sometimes subjective, but the TA is responsible for grading his or her own section. Farrell asked if the supervising faculty member made the final judgment of the value of the grade. Lee said that was true. Frenier stated that in all her classes, she and the TAs lead discussion groups. They all grade everyone together, but she makes the final judgment on the grade.

Farrell stated he still feels there is a privacy issue here. Frenier agreed since in a situation where a faculty member is grading 70 tests and the TA is grading only the objective part, the TA is still able to see the name of the student being graded. She wondered if there could be some type of numbering system so TAs would not know the name of the student they were grading. Neuharth stated that this is how he does it in his classes. His TAs grade only the multiple choice and matching questions that are objective, but they have no idea whose test they are grading. Neuharth is unaware of which student he is grading until he enters the result in the grade book. The students in the class like this system. Neuharth feels it also makes grading the subjective part of the tests easier for him.

Frenier stated that she too has the TA grade only the objective part of the exams and she grades the subjective part. Lee wondered if some faculty ask TAs to grade the entire tests. He felt this would be a concern. McIntosh wondered if there are any courses where an undergraduate would sign the grade sheet. Frenier could not imagine that happening. Her students don't see the grade sheets. Neuharth stated that it could be happening in the skills activity classes in PE. He said that these courses are taught by undergraduate students. Farrell wondered if a faculty member would not be overseeing those courses. Mooney stated that Mark Fohl supervises them. She is not sure if he always signs the grade sheets.

Utoft mentioned that in her freshman year, she took introductory chemistry. The lab reports for this course were fully graded by TAs. It wasn't until the third quarter that she felt assertive enough to go to the professor with her questions about points taken off her lab reports. The professor agreed that it had been graded too stringently, leaving Utoft wondering how many points she lost in the first two quarters that she would have gained had she been assertive enough to question the grading. She stated that sometimes students are harder on other students.

Korth asked Utoft what fraction of the total grade the lab reports were. Utoft felt they were a sizable portion since they were done weekly. She stated they were also evaluated on their work in the lab, but most of the points came from the lab reports. Taylor said that the entry level chemistry course this year was taught by a professor or by the special teaching instructor. TAs were not grading lab reports this year.

Lee commented that his hope was that students with concerns such as Utoft's would bring them to the CC. He stated that this committee wants to know of concerns such as this. He is aware Utoft's situation would make a student very uncomfortable. Utoft said it is uncomfortable especially for the new student who would not be aware if the professor is receptive to their concerns.

McIntosh commented that his observation is that TAs are generally not as strict with their grading as a professor. TAs are unwilling to take the heat from the other students, so he assumes they grade high. Taylor mentioned he has heard some complaints about students grading math courses. He stated that in math a student will occasionally receive partial credit for a math assignment that is solved in a different manner. When a TA is grading

the work, they frequently neglect to give the partial credit since they are unaware of different approaches to solving the assignment.

Farrell stated that this practice can place students in difficult situations. He would prefer that TAs not be involved in grading anything that requires judgment. Lee commented that the CC must be careful. He stated that every TA action involves some type of judgment. Farrell stated that right and wrong answers don't require judgment. Korth commented that there are many things for TAs to do that don't require grading. Frenier stated that most of the things her TAs do are not connected to grading. Lee said this can, however, be a wonderful way to enhance the education experience.

McIntosh asked Utoft how many were in her Chemistry class. Utoft guessed around 100 students. McIntosh pointed out that meant 100 lab reports to grade each week. He asked if the CC would request the faculty member to grade all 100 lab reports - which would be unmanageable- or should UMM reduce the class size.

Frenier commented that a number system similar to that used by Neuharth would work for her class. Korth said the number system would address the issue of privacy, but not the judgment issue. Neuharth stated he only uses the TAs for the matching and multiple choice. Even his true and false answers are too subjective since he requires a written statement to make false answers correct.

Lee mentioned a situation in his discipline where a section is conducted solely by a TA. In this situation the TA must make judgment decisions since grading would definitely be involved. He wondered if the CC would have objections to this. Farrell said he would object. Lee said the proportion of the student's grade would be roughly 20-30% determined by the TA and 70% by the professor. Farrell felt that was an enormous percentage to be done by a non-professional. He stated that faculty were hired to make those judgments.

Frenier reminded the CC of McIntosh's issue, the large amount of grading needed for certain classes. Lee stated that this is a reality the faculty need to cope with. Farrell agreed. He was not disputing a need for some assistance from TAs. McIntosh felt that if an undergrad TA is carrying out the instruction, then it would be reasonable for the TA to carry out the evaluation.

Utoft wondered if students are notified if TAs will be grading them. Frenier said in her classes the students would be informed. Other faculty members agreed with Frenier. Utoft said she seemed to remember that in her freshman chemistry class, they did not realize they were graded by a TA.

Farrell stated that he taught as an undergraduate. The purpose of his teaching was to explain things the students didn't understand. He informed and explained things that there wasn't time for in the regular class time. This was an addition to - not in place of - the regular class.

Korth feels the CC should gather more information before making any decisions regarding this issue. Utoft said she would like to talk to a few students to learn of their experiences. Farrell warned that student opinion changes. It doesn't mean much in the long term. If he were a student in a situation where he did not have a choice regarding a TA grading him, he would formally protest.

Lee commented that in reading all the student evaluations, he has never encountered a complaint regarding student TAs. Farrell stated that no student has ever come to him with a complaint, nor has he ever read a negative student evaluation regarding undergraduate TAs. McIntosh would like to know how extensive the TA grading and instruction is at UMM. He would like more information since we only have bits of information at this time.

Korth recommended that the CC drop the issue until more information is gathered. He suggested the possibility of the CC preparing a statement that would be suggestive, prescriptive, or restrictive. Frenier would like to get a sense of how much TA grading goes on at UMM. Haugen wondered if the CC would want to know about the size of the classes involved. McIntosh felt that was appropriate information to gather. Mooney stated the only method to obtain this information would be to survey faculty. Frenier agreed and stated she felt CC was opening a can of worms and taking on what would be a big task.

Lee stated that the students are our clientele and they are seriously affected by this. Utoft wondered if the TAs are ever formally evaluated. Frenier said they are occasionally mentioned on the faculty evaluation. but there is no formal evaluation. Utoft mentioned situations where there are more than one TA for the same course. She stated they grade differently; one can be harsh and the other lenient. This would be unfair to the students. Frenier said the professor should be watching for that, if there is a major difference between the groups, that should be a flag.

Frenier would love to avoid formalizing this issue. If the CC learns that this is a big concern, then the CC should formalize it. Korth suggested the CC adopt a statement urging restraint and caution in the use of students grading students. Frenier agreed with this idea and recommended that the CC only do the study if it is learned that it has to be done.

Korth said in closing that Engin Sungur will attend the next meeting to report on the General Education Assessment Subcommittee.

Meeting adjourned 8:50 a.m.
Submitted by Melody Veenendaal

