

Minutes of 21 September 2015

Circulated 26 October 2015

Approved 26 October 2015

THE UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN
SENATE ASSEMBLY MEETING
21 SEPTEMBER 2015

Present: Aidala, Atzmon, Baker, Battacharrya, Brown, Casida, Cattaneo, Dolins, Ellis, Erickson, Fagerlin, Fossum, Freeman, Friesen, Kileny, Kirshner, Krivokapic, Kupferschmid, Lehman, Liu, Lyman, Malek, Mondro, Moss, Nielsen, Orady, Pecina, Raphael, Rothman, Schultz, Schmidt, Schwank, Skolarus, Smith, Smith, Szymanski, Veatch, Winful, Weineck, Winful, Ziff

Alternate Requested: Adunbi, Broglio, Gaggio, Lim, Schloss

Alternates: N/A

Absent: Adlerstein Gonzalez, Atchade, Bagley, Beck, Bertacco, Bruch, Carlos, Chen, Cohn, Mortenson, Fraser, Gocek, Grosh, Kaartinen, Keshamouni, Pandey, Princen, Shaefer, Swain, Wang, Welsh, Woodard, Wright, Zeisberg

SENATE ASSEMBLY

AGENDA

September 21, 2015

3:15 pm

Forum Hall

Palmer Commons

3:15 Call to Order/Approval of Agenda and Minutes

Chair Weineck called the meeting to order

3:20 Approval of the Agenda

3:21: Minutes of 20 April Minutes approved

3:20 Announcements

Chair Weineck reviewed the role of the Faculty Senate and the Senate Assembly. The roles of the Senate and Senate Assembly are defined by Regents' Bylaw 4.01, which reads:

The senate is authorized to consider any subject pertaining to the interests of the university, and to make recommendations to the Board of Regents in regard thereto. Decisions of the University Senate with respect to matters within its jurisdiction shall constitute the binding action of the university faculties.

The Senate Assembly speaks for the Senate on everything that is connected with educational policy. Meetings of the Senate Assembly will often feature invited speakers, including the President and Provost.

Chair Weineck invited members of the Senate Assembly to consider joining committees, pointing out that all executive officers had their own committees.

Chair Weineck pointed out that the role of the Senate Advisory Committee on University Affairs (SACUA) is the executive committee of the Senate Assembly. SACUA's role is defined in Regents' Bylaw 4.08:

The Senate Advisory Committee on University Affairs, on behalf of the assembly, shall advise and consult with the president of the university on matters of university policy and shall serve as an instrument for effecting the actions of the senate and the assembly. It shall nominate and supervise the committees of the assembly and shall perform other functions delegated to it by these bylaws or by the assembly

Chair Weineck announced that the Senate's Twenty-Fifth Anniversary Symposium on Academic and Intellectual Freedom, "Fragility of Our Freedoms," will be held at 4 pm on Thursday, October 8, in the Honigman Auditorium, 100 Hutchins Hall of the Law School. The program will include Natalie Zemon Davis (Professor Emerita, Princeton University), "Experiencing Exclusion: Scholarship in the Wake of Inquisition," and Joan Wallach Scott (Professor Emerita, Institute for Advanced Study) "Civility and Academic Freedom".

Chair Weineck announced that a new Parental Leave Policy, pointing out that until August 20, the University had a parental leave policy granting all faculty, male and female, one term for a new biological or adoptive child; the policy has been changed so that birth mothers can have up to two terms of modified duties. This policy change was made without input from SACUA.

Chair Weineck announced there is an empty seat on the AST governing council as the previous member was appointed chair of Psychology. Volunteers for this position should e-mail Chair Weineck.

3:30 Senate Assembly Meeting Planning for 2015-16

Faculty Involvement in Reducing Student Drinking

Professor Potter introduced the issue by saying that the Student Relations Advisory Committee (SRAC) had held extensive discussions of the issue of excessive alcohol consumption by undergraduates, pointing out that a wide range of initiatives were in place through Student Affairs to educate students and provide alternative activities. He noted that the problem was especially significant in the case of first and second year students; juniors and seniors tended to make different choices. He also observed that the number of lecture classes for first- and second-year students that occur with a Friday section have declined significantly in the course of the last couple of years, leading to a more intensive culture of student drinking on what is now known as "thirsty Thursday." He did not wish to suggest that the majority of our students aren't extremely serious, but there has been an upsurge in alcohol-related issues and that if Friday becomes a regular school day, drinking will decline.

The SRAC recommended that, in addition to the measures already in place, the University promote the teaching of more classes for first- and second-year students on Fridays, the SRAC's recommendation was that 100 and 200 level courses with ten or more sections should have a mandatory meeting on Fridays.

Chair Weineck invited comments; Chair Weineck noted that we are required to offer teach 15% of sections on a Friday; a question was raised about resources available on the issue of Friday teaching and declines in drinking. Professor Potter replied that there were extensive resources.

Chair Weineck asked if the Senate Assembly would endorse a suggestion that First- and Second-Year courses be scheduled on Friday.

A straw poll was taken with overwhelming support for the Senate Assembly to prepare a proposal supporting increased teaching of large 100 and 200 level courses on Fridays.

Publication of Student Evaluations

Professor Lehman introduced a discussion of the Central Administration's proposal to release course evaluations publically, which he noted was a matter only for the Ann Arbor capus. The Academic Affairs Advisory Committee (AAAC) was asked to by the Provost on 14 November 2014 to engage with a request from Central Student Government (CSG) to release questions 1-4 on teaching evaluations. Professor Lehman had asked for a straw poll at the 17 November 2014 Senate Assembly meeting. 44 members were present, but only about half of them participated in the straw poll. Of those who participated, approximately 60% of members supported release of the data, 40% opposed it. The Administrative Evaluation Committee (AEC) declined to add a question to its survey, taking the position that it should be a decision for the faculty's elective representatives. The AAAC discussed the proposal extensively, and on April 17 a consensus emerged that a prerequisite to any endorsement of public release of course evaluation data was construction of questions that would replace two that are considered most problematic (questions 1 and 2), as these questions are suspected of rating only popularity and not student learning. Members also pointed out that in multi-section courses students sometimes attend lectures in sections other than their own, and therefore the ratings they assign do not represent their section instructors.

Members would like questions one and two replaced with the following questions:

1. The quality of instruction in this course was effective in contributing to your learning (try to set aside your feelings about the course content).
2. This course contributed effectively to your learning.

The provost said that she would ask CRLT to develop alternative questions to the two that committee members regard as most problematic. This had not happened as of 11 September 2015,

When asked why they wanted the information on the forms made public, students responded, on January 30, 2014 that their interests were in determining:

- Which professor should be elected if more than one teaches the course
- How easy is the course?

- Questions very specific to the course, such as methods and choice of software (these elicit high response rates).

On 13 February 2014 students presented the AAAC with a Resolution in Support of Publicly Available Course Evaluations, unanimously approved by LSA Student Government on 11 February 2015 as well as an undated open letter favoring the same action signed by representatives of LSA Student Government, Central Student Government, and Rackham Student Government

Professor Lehman informed the assembly that the AAAC had passed a resolution passing a motion to the Assembly:

Whereas representatives of Student Governance have requested timely release of course evaluation ratings from university sources, and
Whereas course evaluation records are retained and permanently archived by the central administration and are readily accessible for unit and departmental review, and through requests under the Freedom of Information Act, therefore, the Senate Assembly, in its capacity as the legislative arm of the University Senate, approves timely release by the central administration each semester of the summary numerical scores and response rates for evaluation questions about university courses that have more than 30 students enrolled subject to the following conditions:

- Faculty members can exercise a voluntary choice to release or not to release the student ratings for their course by recording their choice at the time that course grades are submitted on CTools or other electronic submission system.
- In courses with multiple sections, only aggregated, averaged ratings should be released.
- Faculty have the opportunity to post a statement that will accompany any released numerical ratings.”

Chair Weineck noted that there are reasons to be concerned about the proposal to release the evaluations and invited comments.

Professor Smith asked if the proposal affected courses for graduate students in professional schools or just undergraduates. Chair Weineck said that Rackham Student Government (RSG) was involved in the request. She then discussed other potential consequences of the release of data. Other caveats include: the instrument was designed to give confidential feedback to instructors, not to assist students in course selection; potential bias along lines of race, gender, and national origin; discrepancies between the courses evaluated and courses open for enrollment (many departments teach different subject matter under the same course number); the E+E instrument is several decades old and does not represent assessment state-of-the-art; the general lack of consensus concerning the validity of student evaluations for assessing pedagogical quality and learning outcomes. None of these caveats, Weineck continued, implied that UM students do not have a legitimate desire to have access to detailed information about the courses offered at UM; rather, feedback from faculty had suggested that a better instrument be designed

and that any policy for releasing evaluation data ought to be developed with strong student and faculty governance input.

Another potential concern was the potential audience for the evaluations; the proposal shared with SACUA suggested making them accessible to anybody with a umich.edu account. Professor Lehman stated that students had suggested that they would continue to request the data under FOIA; in addition, not releasing the data would refer students to internet sites such as ratemyprofessor.com The AAAC had convinced student representatives to see that there were problems with their approach.

Members of the assembly raised issues on both sides of the question.

Points raised in favor of publication of the data:

1. Some alternatives to the release of data could be worse; what alternatives were available to students?
2. Since the ratings are used by departments and colleges in the context of tenure and promotion decisions as well as in choosing recipients of teaching awards, the university has accorded them a certain degree of validity already.
3. Medical faculty are evaluated by patients, colleagues and others on a constant basis; public evaluations are a wide-spread practice of current life.

Points raised in opposition:

1. In the past students had published ratings, but the practice ended at some point without protest from the students. Students can express their feelings in a number of places.
2. The purpose of the evaluations should be clarified: if they are intended for students, they should be released, if they are intended for the professional development of faculty members, they should not be.
3. Student evaluations are only one feature of holistic evaluations of faculty teaching; releasing only the student evaluations would be misleading as to the nature of the evaluation process
4. There was a tendency for evaluations to track grades and workload, so that courses with rigorous grading practices and heavy workloads tended to receive lower evaluations irrespective of actual student learning. In some areas faculty members who had not completed a full syllabus in a course that was part of a sequence might receive more enthusiastic evaluations than faculty who had taught all that was expected for the sequence
5. Anecdotal evidence suggests that students who rated a difficult class harshly were deeply appreciative of its rigor and challenge years later
6. Response rates are very low and have declined in particular since the current system went online. In consequence, the evaluation data can be deeply misleading.
7. Legal implications should be investigated.
8. Instruction in large courses or in courses required as part of a sequence is often shared amongst a number of faculty members; course data from one year were therefore irrelevant to another year as the instructor would have changed.



It was suggested that

1. We should develop an instrument that produces more meaningful data; new questions should be developed to better serve the students' interests
2. The Center for Research in Learning and Teaching (CRLT) and the Institute for Social Research (ISR) should be involved in designing this instrument, together with faculty and student representatives
3. It would be beneficial to develop strategies to increase student participation.

Professor Lehman stated that the administration had taken different positions regarding the ownership of the evaluations.

Chair Weineck suggested that the proposal to release the data from the current E&E form should be subject to deliberation of a full faculty senate meeting. A straw poll showed strong support for expanding the next Senate Assembly into a Senate Meeting. She urged members to share information on this issue with their colleagues

Chair Weineck asked members what they felt pressing issues in University government might be. She noted that President Schlissel asked if we could garner support for initiations for university initiations on equity and inclusiveness. A question about the poor athletic facilities for the general university population was raised. Professor Potter said that there was now an initiative to improve them, subject to sufficient fund-raising.

Professor Weineck introduced the Professional Standards SPG and asked for feedback on the notion of community conduct standards, including conduct on social media.

4:35 Professor Lehman introduced the following motion:

The Academic Affairs Advisory Committee (AAAC) has been apprised by both student governance representatives and by the Executive Vice President for Academic Affairs that students have expressed concern about the widespread practice of scheduling course assessments or examinations during the final week of classes each semester. Although the AAAC recognizes and strongly supports the primacy of faculty judgment about pedagogical methods and assessment tools in their individual courses, it also recognizes that an incidental consequence to students of such practice may be the scheduling of multiple assessments in a single day, resulting in fatigue and hardship. Consequently, the AAAC encourages faculty not to schedule comprehensive final examinations at times other than during the prescribed final examination period. The AAAC also asks faculty to weigh carefully the possible cumulative effects of scheduling course assessments during the final week of classes as they decide individually how best to conduct their instruction and evaluation of students.

He noted that this was not handing down an order, it was asking faculty to think about the nature of their assessments.

Chair Weineck asked for discussion. Professor Smith said that this is reasonable but asked for definition of the word “comprehensive.” Professor Lehman responded that faculty should define what they mean by “comprehensive.” Professor Schultz said that there were many project courses that do not have a final exam; moving up deadlines might result in a drop of student participation during the last week of classes.

4:42 Approval of the motion was unanimous

4:43 Chair Weineck introduced approval of committee membership and charges; Approval was unanimous

4:44 Unfinished Business/Matters Arising: none

4:45 Adjournment

Respectfully submitted

David Potter
Senate Secretary Pro Tempore

University of Michigan Bylaws of the Board of Regents, Sec. 4.01:

The University Senate

The senate is authorized to consider any subject pertaining to the interests of the university, and to make recommendations to the Board of Regents in regard thereto. Decisions of the University Senate with respect to matters within its jurisdiction shall constitute the binding action of the university faculties.

University of Michigan Bylaws of the Board of Regents, Sec. 4.04:

The Senate Assembly

The Senate Assembly shall serve as the legislative arm of the senate.

The assembly shall have power to consider and advise regarding all matters within the jurisdiction of the University Senate which affect the functioning of the university as an institution of higher learning, which concern its obligations to the state and to the community at large, and which relate to its internal organization insofar as such matters of internal organization involve general questions of educational policy.

Rules of the University Senate, the Senate Assembly and the Senate Advisory Committee on University

Affairs: In all cases not covered by rules adopted by the Senate, the procedure in Robert's Rules of Order shall be followed.