

**The University Senate
of Michigan Technological University**

Minutes of Meeting 479
7 October 2009

Synopsis:

The Senate:

- Heard and responded to a presentation from Brad Baltensperger on the University's general education program
- Agreed to a special Senate meeting on October 14 to hear a presentation from the Benefits Office on changes in health and retirement benefits
- Passed Proposal 1-10 Revised Academic Policy

1. Call to order and roll call. President Rudy Luck called the University Senate Meeting 478 to order at 5:30 pm on Wednesday, October 7, 2009. The Senate Secretary Marilyn Cooper called roll. Absent were Senators Vogler and Koszykowski, and representatives of Army/Air Force ROTC, the Library, Materials Science and Engineering, Academic Services A, Academic Services B, and Auxiliaries and Cultural Enrichment.

2. Recognition of visitors. Guests included Max Seel (Provost), Brad Baltensperger (General Education), Deb Charlesworth (Graduate School), and Pat Gotshalk (Student Affairs).

3. Approval of agenda. L. Davis **moved** approval of the agenda; Malette seconded the motion; it **passed** unanimously on a voice vote.

4. Presentation: The University's General Education Program, by Brad Baltensperger

Baltensperger said he had received a number of questions from Senators. He said he was not going to answer each one, but instead would try to give a sense of where the General Education program is, where we see it heading, and what some of the challenges are.

In the 1998 report from the task force that led to the revision of the General Education program, the goals were not very well articulated (see attached slides). (The report is on the General Education website, where all the documents including the minutes from 2000-09 are available.) The statement of philosophy listed concerns of General Education programs generally. The goals aren't really goals or skills, but a list of things we want covered in a university education. Those aren't the goals of the program; those are some of the areas students might study to achieve whatever the goals are. We need a better articulated set of goals because we can't know what we have achieved unless we state what we are aiming for.

The structure of Gen Education program originally consisted of four core courses (13 credits), a distribution requirement (15 credits), a science/engineering/CS/mathematics requirement (16 credits), and a co-curricular requirement (equivalent to 3 credits). The administration of the program consisted of a General Education Council of 14 members representing all colleges and schools, and four subcommittees: first-year, communications, distribution, and executive. Originally there was a really big committee of 56 faculty which never met.

Baltensperger offered a summary of the changes have been made over the last nine years. During the last two years, we've attempted to address some of the requirement issues and some of the administrative issues. How the members of the General Education Council would be selected and by whom was vague. No changes have been made in the core courses. The distribution requirement has changed a lot. The five lists were shrunk to two, and then going into fall 2008, the two lists were replaced by one Humanities, Arts, and Social Sciences (HASS) list which stood in contrast to the Sciences, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM) list. The three-credit limit on activities was retained but renamed creative endeavors to avoid confusion with physical education or ROTC physical activities courses. A new supplemental list was created which enabled departments to list courses that were more instrumental and less "liberal-artsy" than courses that would normally be considered to be General Education courses. All distribution courses were reviewed in 2007-08. The Science/Engineering/CS/Mathematics list was renamed the STEM list. The co-curricular requirement remained unchanged.

The General Education Council was shrunk to 11 members who are appointed by the provost. The council includes a representative of each of the four core courses, four representatives of STEM disciplines, a representative of the writing center, a representative of the distribution committee, and the director of General Education. Three-year rotating terms on the committee were established. The Perspectives committee is a group of faculty who vet proposals; the World Cultures committee is a group of faculty who teach that course; and the distribution committee hasn't had much to do since 2007-08 when they did an analysis of the courses that fit on the distribution lists.

Provost Seel asked why there is no institutions committee. Baltensperger said that we've had a difficult time identifying a core faculty who are regularly engaged in and leading that course. He added that there is a

process for the management of the Revisions course within the Humanities department, where the course is directed by the Writing Programs Administrator.

Baltensperger said that one of the issues that has often come up concerns the role of the Senate relative to the General Education Council (GEC) in making adjustments to the General Education program. The genesis of the program is unusual; the ballot the faculty voted on did not include a document we improved; it was a general agreement to move forward with a new program based more or less on the report of the General Education Task Force. The GEC's position has been that the general outline of the requirements is the responsibility of the faculty as a whole, as represented through the Senate or through the whole faculty. It's not up to the GEC to make changes to the general outline. Changes within that framework have been what the GEC has been concerned with ever since it was established in 2000.

There were some questions about Perspectives in particular, about the faculty who teach the course and about the quality of instruction. In 2009-10 Perspectives is being taught by 33 instructors: 16 tenured or tenure track faculty, 7 full-time faculty/staff, 3 ABD graduate students, and 11 adjuncts. Of these, 27 hold terminal degrees; 25 have taught Perspectives for three or more semesters, 2 have taught it once before, and 6 are first-time Perspectives instructors. It's a very stable staff. When the program was originally discussed, the idea was that Perspectives would be taught by full-time faculty so students would get to know the professional faculty of the University. That would have required that roughly 60 faculty across the university would have to teach the course every fall (unless some taught two sections). The colleges and schools decided that they could not staff that course. The original plan was that every unit had a quota; that was quickly eliminated. The Humanities Department was left with a requirement of 16 sections, and a budget line was added to General Education to hire staff, whether adjuncts or tenured and tenure track faculty by transferring funds into departmental and school accounts to pay for the instruction of however many remaining sections were needed. There is no budget for hiring full-time faculty or of compelling departments to assign full-time faculty to teach Perspectives. We actually have quite good instruction with the system we have in place. We have stability in instruction and good teaching evaluations. In Fall 2008 the average score for all Perspectives instructors on question 20 was 4.41, while the University average is 4.1 There is a minor difference in average score between tenured and tenure track and full-time faculty (4.48) and ABD and adjunct faculty (4.34). Last fall, in only 6 of 60 sections, did the instructor received less than a 4.0.

World Cultures is taught typically by tenured and tenure-track faculty. In 2009-10, it is being taught by 4 tenured or tenure track faculty and 1 full-time faculty, and all 5 hold PhDs. Revisions is taught by graduate students in the Humanities Department. In 2009-10, Institutions is being taught by 6 instructors in Social Sciences and Business and Economics, of whom 3 are tenured or tenure track faculty, 1 is full-time faculty/staff, and 2 are adjunct faculty; 4 of these hold PhDs.

Storer asked how many Perspectives instructors hold PhDs. Baltensperger said 22-24 including most of the adjuncts.

He then summarized the plans for review and revision of the General Education program. There is a need to clarify goals of the program and for the core courses. We are working on and will complete the clarification of goals and common expectations for the core courses this year. If we want to know if these courses are meeting their goals, we need to know what the goals are. We need to articulate the goals of the program as a whole. We don't explain very well to students why they are taking these courses. We would like to move Revisions to the first year. The goal originally was, in the first semester in Perspectives, to gradually introduce University practice and process to students; to bring them into a small class that is discussion focused, writing intensive, and that helps them engage with the intellectual atmosphere of the University. Then in second semester, they go into the 240-student World Cultures classes. If the idea is a gradual induction process, we'd be much better off with Revisions in the first year and moving World Cultures to the second year. This is a goal, but achieving it is not straightforward for two reasons. In the transition year, we would need more Revisions sections to cover both sophomores and first-year students. Also, currently we teach only about 45 sections of Revisions (due to attrition and students taking first-year writing in summer at home), and we would need 60 sections. The advantage of moving World Cultures to the second year is that then the students in that course would have a better understanding of what it means to be a student at Michigan Tech and the level of effort it takes and the level of concentration it takes to sit through a 75-minute lecture.

Another effort is to find ways to increase the emphasis on writing in the University curriculum. So we want to move Revisions to the first year, but also, as many universities are doing, find ways to infuse writing throughout the curriculum and throughout the four or five years of college. We want to infuse writing into higher-level courses and especially into senior design courses where students see the value of being able to write coherently. We will be re-evaluating the STEM and HASS distribution requirements. The HASS list has 300 courses from which students choose 5. It's unclear what learning outcomes this is supposed to produce, or what priorities are important for a University education. We are going to start working on this in the spring, possibly with a group of faculty from the Senate Curricular Policy Committee, from departments in HASS, and from the GEC. This has to be a university-wide discussion with the goal of creating the outlines of a new set of requirements connected with HASS and perhaps with STEM. A lot of universities now have a diversity requirement, or an international requirement; some have an environmental science or a sustainability requirement; lots have very creative writing requirements. We also need leaders for the four core courses. One change that is taking place is a slight modification of the description of Revisions and a title change to Composition: Written, Oral, and Visual. The original idea that students would revise their writing from perspectives in that course, but that never happened.

Barry Solomon offered some comments and observations at the invitation of President Luck. He has been teaching Institutions for 10 years and has been talking with instructors and students in the core courses. He said that there doesn't seem to be a very clear process for General Education reform. Problems with the core courses have been identified for years and but no action has been taken (other than the modification of Revisions proposed this year). It's critical that the GEC actively solicit input from the whole faculty and the University Senate. In the report from the GEC there is a little too much emphasis on student course evaluations to determine how courses are running. It's one instrument, but it shouldn't be the only way we are assessing how the courses are working. Perspectives needs faculty from a broader range of departments to make the courses as dynamic and engaging as possible. The Perspectives course also provides an opportunity to integrate stronger ethical education, which was called for in the original proposal for the course. There seems to be some opposition to this, but organizations such as the National Science Foundation are increasingly emphasizing ethics in education including for undergraduate students. Another concern is that with all the instructors for Revisions being GTIs, this might telegraph to students that the course is devalued by faculty. Solomon used to be the coordinator for Institutions and observed that there has been a problem with buy-in from key faculty from the beginning that needs to be addressed. One way might be to expand the pool of possible faculty to bring dynamism to the course and avoid the narrow disciplinary perspective that often arises. Since education is one of the basic institutions, faculty from Cognitive and Learning Science might be included. In World Cultures, the course assignments and films should be updated annually to keep the course fresh and relevant; there is possibly too much emphasis on certain disciplines, e.g., on history to the neglect of modern day cultures. This has been a problem in Institutions too; these are supposed to be General Education courses, and yet the faculty who teach them revert to focusing on a particular discipline. And there is a pattern of misconduct on homework assignments, which might be partly due the size of the classes.

Provost Seel commented that Revisions is a remnant from the first-year writing course, which at all research universities is taught by GTIs, so that's not unusual.

Cooper said that that's true but before the new General Education program was put in place a large number of faculty at Michigan Tech were teaching first-year writing, but since the Humanities Department was required to teach 16 sections of Perspectives, all those faculty who used to teach writing are now teaching Perspectives.

Solomon said the question is why this course is different. There are other universities that have similar General Education courses and the rest of the core courses are taught by graduate students as well.

Caneba asked about the plan to teach Perspectives in the summer. Baltensperger said that we have been teaching 2-3 sections in the summer for the last 3 years.

Boschetto-Sandoval said that the report from the GEC mentions frequent student criticisms of WC for being too large and for using a lecture format, and she asked whether there is any quantitative data on how many students are saying that. Baltensperger said no, it is based on impressions. We have done very little true assessment of the General Education program as a whole and of the core courses and once we shifted over to the new accreditation system, the pressure to do that fell away. The dissatisfaction with World Cultures largely results from the course being taught as lectures to very large sections. Everyone who teaches World Cultures would say that their normal teaching evaluations drops a half a point when they teach the course.

Boschetto-Sandoval asked if there have been complaints about the multiple choice exams. Baltensperger said no. The only complaint we get from students is about inconsistency across sections, but that also happens with all multiple section courses. Boschetto-Sandoval said that if you want to increase the writing ability of students, then section size would be a factor. Baltensperger agreed but pointed out that one of the clear goals for World Cultures to be a large section course so that Perspectives could have small sections. There are resource constraints. Scarlett added that students in World Cultures are doing 20-30 pages of writing per student during the semester. The problem is that there are a number of students who still write on their evaluations, I don't have to know anything about these things; I'm going to be an engineer. These comments are a reflection of the fact that in the larger atmosphere many students are picking up on the vibe that these courses are not valuable to them. Clearly that is a minority of students, but we don't have any way of knowing how many students feel that way.

Johnson asked whether we have looked at our peer engineering institutions to see what they are doing. Baltensperger said we have not done any systematic benchmarking. He said that there was no process of reform built into the program. But he said that he doesn't want to just benchmark with peers, but rather with those institutions who are making creative changes. Some are in our peer institutions and others are in large multiversities. Solomon said that the consultant from WPI was very helpful; WPI has a very strong global studies, international involvement in their curriculum.

Luck asked whether they had compared evaluation scores of instructors teaching Perspectives with the scores the same faculty get in other courses.

Baltensperger said they have no data on that. The adjunct faculty are mostly not teaching other courses, so we couldn't get a comparison on them. He added that that is one of the advantages of adjunct faculty: they can really commit to their Perspectives courses and spend a tremendous amount of time working on them. Another advantage of adjunct faculty is that if they aren't doing a very good job, you can find someone else to teach the next semester. The high scores might be because of the size of the course, or that these are first-year students who don't know how to be nasty to faculty, or that these are an engaging courses that try to draw students in. Snyder commented that the score might have something to do with the other courses they are taking in the fall of the first year.

Smith suggested that taking a really good survey of students would be better than drawing on anecdotes. We don't know what the students think, and yet we are making decisions based on what we think they think. Baltensperger said we have done some focus groups in the past on World Cultures, but we haven't done it in a long time. The University is not as driven by assessment as it once was.

Smith asked whether attendance is good in World Cultures. Baltensperger said part the issue is the individual faculty's attendance policy; in classes where attendance is closely monitored, attendance is 90 percent, while in others where attendance is the responsibility of students, it isn't as high.

Cooper asked whether the GEC has gotten advice from the Writing Program about moving Revisions to the first year, because that goes exactly against the trend across the country which is to require writing courses in all four or five years rather than jamming them all in the first year and saying that takes care of the writing instruction.

Baltensperger said that the GEC's interest in moving Revision to the first year is as much because it is a small section course as because it's writing. We are strongly supportive of the idea that students should be getting a course in each year that gives them instruction that improves their writing skills. It will take resources and we need to especially work on getting writing into courses in the sophomore and junior years, because in senior year, most programs have a senior design or senior project where writing is or could be a major component of the course. Solomon commented that there is writing in Institutions as well, so all the core courses have writing to a certain degree.

Baltensperger concluded by saying that what he sees the GEC doing this year is to discuss some of these issues with departments teaching HASS subjects this semester, and then next semester to move to a broader approach involving the Senate, the GEC, departments. He doesn't project bringing something to the Senate by next fall, but it should not drag out to five years.

5. Approval of minutes from Meeting 478. L. Davis **moved** approval of the minutes; Smith seconded the motion; it **passed** unanimously on a voice vote.

6. Report of the President and Senate Committees

Luck said he has received some suggestions to which he would respond. One suggestion was to use clickers to register votes on the Senate floor. The executive committee discussed this suggestion and rejected it because the logistics are complex and it would slow down dealing with business. On some issues it would make sense, but if it's a proposal, it's necessary to have open discussion and to express opinions fearlessly so that we all know where different units stand. Another suggestion that was agreed to was to ask those making presentations to the Senate to distribute slides or other information to Senators two days before the Senate meeting so that they could study it and have questions ready, as was possible today after Senators received the report of the General Education Council.

Luck discussed the difference between "laying on the table" and "postponing": the proposal tabled at the last meeting should have been postponed.

He announced that we will now list on the website the proposals as they are received along with the date of receipt in the Senate office. The big benefit is that everyone can track the progress of a proposal. Once a proposal goes to the administration, it must be acted on in 90 days or the proposal goes into effect. This will also hold true for unit charters that are submitted to the Senate.

He announced that the recommendations from the Benefits Liaison Group (BLG) are coming soon. Next Monday, October 12, the BLG will meet with the Senate Fringe Benefits Committee, the Deans and the Compensation Strategy Task Force to discuss their recommendations on health care and retirement benefits. On Tuesday, October 13, President Mroz will address these issues at a campus-wide forum. The Benefits Office have asked whether the Senate is interested in a special meeting on October 14 to hear what these recommendations might be. The Senate Officers discussed this issue, and we were interested in having them come to this meeting, because the recommendations would then be a work in progress. The Benefits Office declined to come to this meeting. If we agree to the special meeting next week, it will just be a discussion of what has already been decided. This could well be done in the October 21 meeting. He asked for discussion of the merits of a special meeting next week.

Seel noted that the decline of the invitation for today was mainly due to the people being tied up with Board of Control members and donors who are in town this week in connection with the BOC meeting.

Storer asked whether the October 14 meeting could replace the October 21 meeting. Luck said that he is considering canceling a later Senate meeting, but not the October 21 meeting as we have scheduled a presentation from the winner of the Teaching Award from last year. Snyder observed that whenever we hear this presentation, it will take a full meeting for us to address its implications, so that meeting should be a one-item agenda meeting. Pierce mentioned the concern that having the meeting on October 14 would not allow Senators enough time to consult their constituents to see what they think so that we could discuss those concerns with the Benefits Office. Herbeck suggested that the October 14 meeting would be more for Senators to be informed in order to disburse the information. After that there will be open forums to address all constituencies across campus. Luck agreed with Herbeck's assessment, and added that the open enrollment period starts November 1, so the time is somewhat short.

Storer **moves** that we have a special meeting on October 14 and if there is no pressing business, we cancel the December meeting; seconded by Smith. Luck said that it is an important decision. The big problem is

that if it's just a report, we could just read it. If we could have some input it would be better. But at the same time it is such an important issue that the meeting might well be of some use in alerting you. The motion **passed** on a voice vote with two dissents.

Christianson asked if Luck would request that they provide information two days in advance of the meeting. Luck said he would ask, but that he knows they still have data they need to obtain. He could also ask for permission to distribute the data from the BLG if it is available.

Storer reported that the Curricular Policy Committee is working on Proposal 16-09 Double Majors at MTU that was returned to the committee at the end of last year. They are also working on a proposal for a graduate degree in Sustainable Water Resource Systems, a name change of the English BA degree in the Humanities Department, and discussing methods of clarifying residency requirements for certificate programs.

7. Old Business

a. Proposal 1-10 Revised Academic Policy, presented by the Instructional Policy Committee

Snyder stated that objections voiced on Senate floor centered around whether the administrative officer, the deciding person in a case involving academic integrity, could assign an F* grade to a student. The F* says that the student failed the course for reasons of violations of academic integrity. There was a proposal on the floor that the deciding person should not be allowed to do that; that they could only make a recommendation to the faculty member to assign an F*. The committee considered that proposal and disagreed with it. There are a couple of reasons for that. First the violation of academic integrity is a University offense, and sanctions and due process are University matters that are outside the prerogatives of the faculty. Faculty members already exercise discretion about how serious this offense is when they forward the case to the Dean of Students or to the Graduate School for review. Second, the F* is not a grade in the course but a sanction given to the student for a violation of academic integrity. Allowing faculty the prerogative to accept or decline the decision-makers recommendation could result in considerable lack of uniformity in how sanctions were imposed. Individual faculty have little way to know whether a violation of academic integrity is a pattern of behavior on the part of the student. Putting the sole responsibility on the instructor to assign or not assign an F* would subject the faculty member to considerable pressure not to assign F*s. Faculty already get pressure from the students about grades and it would be worse with F*s. We could also expect calls from parents and threats of lawsuits, which the Dean of Students office currently deals with. He said he would rather be evaluating students based on their performances in my class and not having to be the judge, jury, and prosecution when they violate academic integrity. For those reasons, the committee unanimously recommends that we accept the proposal as it was presented.

L Davis **moved to** approve the proposal as submitted, and Solomon seconded the motion.

Storer said that the friendly amendment offered last week was to have the faculty involved in the discussion, not be the one who makes the final decision, and my constituents were surprised and uncomfortable with the current policy allowing administrators to assign grades, and they wanted some other recourse to be possible if a faculty member did not consent to an F* being forced on them. The other concern was that if faculty members have no say in whether an F* is assigned, then faculty members are less likely to report academic integrity issues. We are very concerned that there be an updated academic integrity policy, but we would like to have the instructor consent included in the assigning of F*s.

Stockero said that her colleagues have also asked that she voice opposition to the policy as it stands and ask that the amendment proposed at the last meeting be reconsidered for the reasons that Senator Storer just mentioned. We are concerned about faculty members giving up their right to assign a grade and that faculty members might not report academic integrity issues, which would be a larger concern, as then we wouldn't know about these cases.

Wood said that he is persuaded by Senator Snyder's argument that we don't want to be involved in any of these lawsuits. I've been involved in them and that is just sheer hell.

Onder said that he and other colleagues have been involved in academic integrity cases, and their experience is that faculty have ample input to the process before the sanction is imposed. The administrative officer tries to understand the seriousness of the violation in consultation with the faculty. This being a university offense, I still think that awarding an F*, which is not a grade but a sanction, is appropriately the decision of the administrative officer.

Cooper commented that the policy seems to stipulate that the instructor is involved in assigning F*s, though it's not clear how the faculty is involved. Snyder clarified that the instructor is not involved in the decision to assign an F*, but in the case of a grade reduction, there is considerably more discretion of the faculty member than under the current policy.

Luck asked Storer why he believes he should be the one to say what the punishment should be for an academic integrity violation. Storer said that he doesn't believe that he should be the one who should decide the punishment, but he doesn't buy that the F* is a sanction. It's recorded on the transcript, and transcripts record grades of the student, not sanctions and actions taken against the student. I don't want to tell, if I have referred a student on an issue of academic integrity, but it was a marginal case, what grade to assign. Most of the time, faculty members will agree with the decision of the administrative officer. But if the faculty member doesn't consent to the F* there are other actions that can be taken against the student that don't involve a grade.

Snyder said that there are a variety of sanctions less serious than an F*. An F* is only given for very serious violations. Storer observed that if Multiple faculty have discretion to lower grades for less serious violations, then administration of the policy is not uniform.

Gotshalk said that we're trying to separate the punishment from the grading of academic work. It's a complex system we're working with in trying to come up with a system that balances everybody's needs.

Caneba asked whether a list of egregious violations could be constructed.

Gotshalk said that we do have criteria for assigning sanctions, but a list of egregious violations would be really difficult to put together. Snyder said that the proposal has very good definitions of what academic misconduct is.

Luck asked Gotshalk how many cases the Student Affairs office deals with in a year, and how many would fit into the category of egregious violations. Gotshalk said they deal with more than 100 cases, and those that result in an F* mostly come out of just a few departments where their syllabi have strict statements about collaboration resulting in an F. Maybe 10 cases in a year result in F*.

Stockero asked whether a course syllabus with a clear statement of policy on academic integrity trumps the policy. She said that her colleagues just want to be involved in the process. Gotshalk said it doesn't trump it; it reinforces it. Instructors can define what is unauthorized collaboration. But faculty are always invited to attend the hearings. Some choose not to. We do consult with them.

Charlesworth said that she agreed with Snyder's arguments, and that her primary objection to the proposed amendment is the fairness. She would hate to see two students come in with the same offense and one gets a B in the class and the other gets an F*.

Gotshalk said she felt that this is a big problem, and that any first-year student who does anything questionable should be sent to the dean's office so we can nip this problem in the bud. By and large, students will just get a warning, but if the faculty handle it students will just learn who will let them get away with it.

Onder said that he won't send a student to the Dean of Students unless he is convinced that the student is cheating on purpose. When it comes to a sanction, he doesn't think faculty should decide what should be the sanction.

Snyder called the question. The motion **passed** on a voice vote with some dissent.

10. Adjournment. L. Davis **moved** that the meeting be adjourned; Malette seconded the motion; and President Luck adjourned the meeting at 7:14 pm.

Respectfully submitted
by Marilyn Cooper
Secretary of the University Senate