Minutes from the January 25, 1979 meeting of the University of Montana faculty

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SPECIAL FACULTY SENATE MEETING

January 25, 1979

Present: Ballard, Bennett, Bevis, Bigley, Billstein, Boehmler, Borgmann, Brett, Brown, Campbell, Driessen, Freer, Gordon, Hay, Henningsen, Kirkpatrick, Lange, Lawry, McClain, McCormick, O'Donnell, Oelz, Patton, Pettinato, Porter, Rankin, Schuster, Shannon, Silverman, Taylor, Van De Wetering, Von Kuster, Walsh, Woodbury, Shellen, Bilderback, Habbe (ex-officio) and Bain (ex-officio)

Absent: Bornstein, Chessin (excused), Elison, Ellis, Erickson, Makamara, Shafizadeh, Speake, Haddad

1. The meeting was called to order by Chairman Shellen who noted that the first item on the agenda would be to hear the student representative from ASCRC. He stated that unless there were objections from the Senate, the remarks of the students would be recorded by request of Professor Erickson who was unable to attend the meeting. Shellen also said that this was a special meeting, restricted to consideration of ASCRC's seconded motion concerning the general education requirements proposal.

2. Chairman Shellen introduced Sue Heald, student member of ASCRC. Heald passed out a list of arguments against general education requirements compiled by the students. She stated that the arguments she would present were geared to the specific proposal before the Senate. She stated that the student members of ASCRC who opposed the general education requirement proposal believe that student sentiment is with them for arguing against the proposal. Student committee members of ASUM took a poll of 150 students in which 68% preferred the status quo. Heald stated that the proposal is inequitable to students individually. But, she stated, the students are also concerned with the University community as a whole. She maintained that the proposal is not responsible, is too ambiguous and does not take into account the available resources of the University.

Heald feels that the following extrinsic problems could be debated and changed if the Senate wants a general education proposal. She cited these problems as follows and provided rationale.

1. 48 general education credits is too many.
2. Mandatory letter grade for general education classes is ironic.
3. Transfer students get let off the hook.
4. Students in the schools are burdened less than College of Arts and Sciences students.

Heald also cited and discussed the following problems that she sees as inherent with the proposal:

1. There is no mandate for general education requirement. The statistical basis is questionable.
2. COGE would be overburdened as well as serving as a political devise, which provides form for inter-departmental conflict.
3. Autonomy of schools and departments is threatened.
4. The proposal is inequitable to students regarding special provisions for transfer and school's students.
5. The proposal would shift FTE and SCH vertically from specialists in the major field to general non-major curricula.
6. The proposal would shift FTE and SCH horizontally between departments and schools.

Heald recommended that a solution is to tailor general education requirements to each individual student by having an advisor advise a student on which direction the student should go.

Chairman Shellen opened the floor to questions. Heald was questioned about a second proposal that was presented to ASCRC by the students. She said that the students were new on the committee this year. There was not a vote this fall on whether or not the new ASCRC members wanted to support the general education proposal. Since the new students on the committee opposed the proposal they wrote a memo saying they did not approve of this requirement and preferred status quo. The memo also said that if they had to have general education requirements they would prefer distributional requirements.

Driessen asked Heald if it was her impression that the students are opposed to any general education requirement or if they are opposed to just this one. Heald said that their poll was in favor of status quo. She can't say for sure how the students feel, but as the idea has been discussed more student opinion seems more favorable toward some type of general education requirement. Driessen said that through polling his class he felt most of his students want some form of a loose general education requirement but not one as structured as this.

The Chair opened the meeting to discuss of the motion before the Senate. He said that it would be convenient if he could receive all amendments at that time. No amendments were forthcoming. He noted that amendments could also be submitted later.

Shannon requested to address the Senate on the motion. He said that he worked for four years to do away with the former group requirements before the Senate finally did so. He stated that the Senate did so because of faculty irresponsibility. As a result, they were able to get rid of several "Hickey Mouse" courses that were being taught. He noted that the School of Forestry is trying to educate persons who can practice the profession of Forestry. There is a general distributive education within the School. They require their students to take 125 credits outside of the School of Forestry. The curricular needs of the students vary widely and the school encourages work in 300 and 400 level courses.

Shannon said that the problem that prompted this proposal was that students in the humanities were not taking science and students in the sciences were not taking humanities. He maintained that this is not a problem for the University but for the College of Arts and Sciences and its faculty to address. He also noted that there is a major advising problem but when a committee studied the problem, they found it was a problem of the College and not of the Schools. He said that another problem that has received a great deal of attention this year is that of retention of students. This, he claimed, is also a problem for the College.

Shannon said that the Forestry School is facing accreditation problems and they are on notice that the current status of one year probation will not be continued or considered again. They are operating on a 25:1 student faculty ratio and should not be exceeding 20:1. One solution to the problem is to reduce the retention rate. But, he noted, that largely out of state students would be affected and they constitute a precious financial resource for the entire University. If Forestry had to re-write
its programs to fit the proposal for general education, it would substantially dilute the quality of education that their students are receiving.

He recommends that a real College of Arts and Sciences be established and that it determine a set of academic and curriculum requirements.

Bilderback moved to amend paragraph three (p5: II.C.2.) on the errata sheet entitled "Additions and Changes to the General Education Requirement Guidelines, 15 January 1979", as follows: strike the words "Dean of the College of Arts and Sciences" and replace with the words "Dean of the appropriate college or school." The motion was seconded and referred to ECOS.

Shellen reminded the Senators that they could engage in debate upon the proposal before them, but by resolution no substantive action could be taken at this meeting.

Flightner, past Chair of ASCRC, commented to the Forestry School that ASCRC has tried very hard to recognize the problems of the Forestry School. He feels the committee will be sympathetic to other problems because they have been sympathetic in the past.

Freer stated that discussion so far has not addressed principles. He noted that the Forestry School's requirements for graduation are not necessarily general education requirements.

Campbell stated that the Business School supports some type of distributive requirements on the basis that they already require 90 credits outside the Business School. However, they find difficulties with the proposal. First, with the complexity and categorization of courses and second with decision making by the committee. They feel they could live with some basic requirements but the mechanism of this proposal concerns them.

Henningsen doesn't like COGE because he sees it as encouraging empire building. He would rather see separate committees for each school and the college. He would like to see the proposal referred back to committee or tabled permanently.

Comment was made that this is an artificial solution to the problem. The solution is to change disciplines that presently don't draw students, rather than to force students into them.

Ballard is bothered by the students' opposition to the proposal. He said that if 5 out of 6 students on the committee couldn't be convinced that this proposal should be brought before the faculty he could not vote for it. He is also sympathetic with the students' view on letter grades. He said that he has never seen any way to get a real College of Arts and Sciences established. He is sympathetic with Shannon's views on this.

Porter feels this would provide a license to hunt student credit hours. If the scheme is implemented those departments now over manned will have a great deal of time to change courses and make new courses to attract students in lower levels. Departments that are under manned may be hurt even more.

Student comment was made that students will spread course selection out if they feel they need to.

O'Donnell said that he has reservations about COGE. He feels the proposal is weak in solving the objectives of the Schools and the College.
Lawry feels that the proposal is an excellent plan and could be made to work. If COGE is composed of the right people it will work for the whole University.

Von Kuster said that the School of Education could live with the proposal because they already require at least 100 to 120 credit hours outside of Education. He is not sure that this proposal is the answer but urges the Senate to not make it a fight between the schools and the college but to work together to find an answer.

Brett is in support of the requirements as they stand in principle. As far as the procedure goes he feels some things could be changed. He feels they should work together to better the document so more people can be satisfied with it.

Hanningsen suggested taking a sampling of students who graduated between 1972-78 and comparing it with those who graduated between 1966-71 concerning the value of group requirements. If objective evidence showed that a general education requirement would be beneficial, he would go for it. He feels that even if this is the right thing they are doing, it is at the wrong time. Because of declining enrollments, all Universities and Colleges are going to be trying to do everything they can to get students to come to their schools. General education requirements will make it harder to attract students. Imposing rigid requirements, although good for students, might not be good for the University of Montana.

Driessen stated that he could not support this proposal because it is too complicated. He is more in favor of a simpler plan which would insure moderation and would be able to be easily managed.

Schuster stated that the issue is whether or not unit faculties will determine their own curriculum or whether other faculties will. He believes that COGE is the "biggest can of worms" the Senate will ever be asked to buy because of the uncertainty, unworkability and undesirability of COGE. How COGE works is the heart of the proposal and he feels the following problems exist with it.

1. No assurances of adequate course offerings. No assurances for nominations or that COGE will accept nominations.
2. COGE will define what skills courses are. It is the intent of ASCRC that skills courses won't count as general education requirements.
3. Planning student programs will be difficult because general education courses can change from quarter to quarter.
4. There is no provision to ensure that COGE members will have any expertise in the philosophy of general education or in all of the four divisions.
5. The work load of COGE is enormous. It would have to resort to subcommittees and this would decentralize academic decision making.
6. COGE could conceivably exert pressure on faculty and administrative processes.

Schuster feels that COGE is totally undesirable.

Haasmann said that ASCRC tried to come up with something different from distribution requirements because the old plan was not acceptable. They decided to divide the University conceptually according to methods of inquiry. They felt that the Department would be the best judge in deciding which area a course would fit. This is why it will be the Department that will nominate a course to fill a slot in the general education requirements.
Hausmann said that they wanted to make sure that general education courses being offered were, in fact, general education courses. This is the reason for COGE, so a committee in its collective wisdom could insure that a particular course meets the intent of a specific area. Their intent was not to disrupt the University. They have made allowances for every area of the University.

The committee was interested in having some way to change, ever so slightly and slowly, so that in time there would be sufficient courses offered here that would satisfy general education requirements.

Von Kuster feels that the quality of the courses cannot be measured by students alone.

Shannon said that he is tired of interfering with the problems of the College of Arts and Sciences and tired of other members of campus, who know nothing about Forestry, influencing their department.

3. Motion was made, seconded and passed to adjourn the meeting. Meeting was adjourned at 5:15.