

Annual Report
Educational Policy Committee of the UNC-CH Faculty Council
April 20, 2000

The Educational Policy Committee (EPC) undertook a number of initiatives during the academic year 1999-2000:

- A request by a UNC-CH faculty member to review the issue of conflicting course schedules
- A request by student government for the institution of a double minor concentration for undergraduates
- An examination of the length of the academic calendar at UNC-CH
- A report on the role of UNC-CH faculty in University policy-making
- An investigation of grade inflation at UNC-CH

These initiatives are in various stages of completion and we will provide brief reports on them below.

Course Conflicts

Professor Peter Robinson of the Department of Geography wrote the Chair of the Faculty in November inquiring as to whether a university policy existed when the requirements of two courses conflicted. Professor Robinson referred specifically to a situation that he had recently encountered (more than once) in which a student in his class was required to be present on a "field trip" in another class at a time when Professor Robinson had scheduled a midterm examination.

Professor Robinson wrote, "Since [students] have to take a make-up exam at a different time, and frequently with a different format, this is, at best, inconvenient for them. Even if it involves simply missing a class, it places them in an invidious position of having to choose between two simultaneous requirements." We agree and note that it places an additional burden on the instructor who must write a make-up exam or make other arrangements for the student to complete missed work.

Professor Robinson continues: "Over the years we in Geography and similar disciplines have developed strategies for field work which minimizes such conflicts: the same trip offered at several different times; trips commencing in the late afternoon; use of weekend travel; visits during mid-semester breaks; or participation before the start of a semester. These are not necessarily perfect, but they minimize the problem."

The EPC agrees with Professor Robinson that, to the extent possible, field work should not be organized to conflict with scheduled class time in other courses. Nevertheless, the total avoidance of such conflicts is probably not possible. In those cases the EPC believes that the responsibility for resolving the conflict should not lie with the student but with the instructors of the courses. We believe that the instructor initiating the conflict should be responsible for contacting the instructors in other affected courses and seeking their assistance in resolving

conflicts. The initiating instructor might offer, for example, to proctor examinations off-site or undertake other accommodations to minimize the impact of lost class time.

At this time, absent objection from the Faculty Council, the EPC does not plan to offer a formal resolution dealing with this issue.

Request for Institution of a Double Minor

In March the EPC received a memo from Shannon Ghadiri - Chair, Academic Affairs Committee and Thomas J. Maloney - Vice Chair, Academic Affairs Committee -- UNC Student Government stating the case for the institution of double minors for undergraduates. The students also reported the results of a student body referendum that overwhelmingly supported the concept of the double minor.

The EPC sees merit in the proposal, but, because of the lateness of submission of the request, has not had the time to give this issue the full study that it deserves. Consequently the EPC will delay final action on this proposal until the academic year 2000-2001.

The Length of the Academic Calendar

Responding to queries from a number of sources, the EPC has begun a study of the consequences of the lengthened academic calendar. This work is ongoing and a fuller report will be made in the fall.

Faculty Role in Policy Making and University Governance

Responding to a request from the Chair of the Faculty, the EPC has spent the year studying the recent and future role of the faculty in University decision making. A report on that subject is nearing completion and should be finished by early summer. We anticipate submission to the Faculty Council for discussion and possible action as early as the September Faculty Council meeting.

Grade Inflation

After the submission of the report on grade inflation in February, the EPC undertook a number of activities to collect public reaction to the issues raised in that report. Specifically, members of the EPC met twice with the Chancellor's Student Advisory Committee, participated in the inaugural "Intellectual Climate Brown Bag Lunch," and cosponsored with student government an open forum on grade inflation that was attended by approximately 100 students and eight or nine faculty. The report received wide attention in the press and the EPC received a number of communications from faculty and some from students. The organized student response was generally (but not entirely) negative. Students stressed four main concerns:

- Grade inflation isn't really inflation because the students are better now and work harder.
- Students who work hard deserve high grades.
- Students would be put at a disadvantage when applying to graduate school or for employment if GPAs overall were to be lowered.
- The cordial atmosphere that exists between faculty and students would be damaged should some professors begin to grade lower.

Faculty response was entirely voluntary and was overwhelmingly supportive of the conclusions of the report. Some faculty and non-faculty objected publicly to the conclusions of the report or to portions of it. Those objections were widely reported in the press.

Still, we do not believe that the faculty as a whole has had sufficient time to digest the implications of the report and to consider actions for the future. Therefore, we propose below resolutions both to disseminate and gather information that will be used to inform a full Faculty Council discussion of the grade inflation issue in the coming academic year:

Resolution 1: The Faculty Council shall authorize the appointment of a Task Force on Grade Inflation with a duration of one academic year. This task force shall be responsible for disseminating information on grading practices to the University community, collecting information from deans of schools and departmental chairs, organizing a major faculty council discussion, and proposing actions for faculty council approval.

Resolution 2: The Task Force on Grade Inflation shall, during the coming academic year disseminate to the University community -- including faculty, deans and chairs -- quantitative information on grading practices that can be used for departmental review and discussion. This information will include the current definitions of letter grades under which the faculty currently works.

Resolution 3: The Faculty Council, acting through the Task Force, shall request of schools and departments formal responses to the report on grade inflation and to specific questions to be developed by the Task Force.

Resolution 4: The Task Force shall present their findings to the Faculty Council and participate in a major discussion of the results of those findings.

Resolution 5: The Task Force shall present a final report to the Faculty Council, possibly including resolutions for further faculty action, by the end of the academic year 2000-2001.

The Educational Policy Committee 1999-2000

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Appendix: Report on Grade Inflation at UNC-CH
(Distributed in February, 2000)