MOTION:

That the Senate adopt the following policy:

Each offering of a course is required to have a syllabus. Instructors are referred to the Classroom Expectations Guidelines for good practice on what should be included in a syllabus.

COMMENT:

The Senate Committee on Educational Policy appointed an ad hoc subcommittee during the 2000-01 academic year to consider the question of requiring a syllabus. After deliberating about the report, the Committee voted to recommend to the Senate a policy that requires all instructors to provide syllabi for their courses. The subcommittee prepared the following comments.

Some University guidelines on important (legal and otherwise) matters require the inclusion of information of certain kinds in syllabi, but the University does not require syllabi in its courses. That seems odd.

Good teaching practice includes informing students in writing of the course requirements and the scope of the course at the beginning of the semester. Good teaching also requires clarity at the start of a course in the mind of the instructor regarding course goals, topics, assignments, and assessment of students.

We thus believe it behooves the University of Minnesota to require syllabi in its courses. The rationale is that full, written disclosure of course details (including the relative weighting of course activities for final grades) at the beginning of the semester is a student right and should reduce misunderstanding later in the semester. It should be a University responsibility.

We also recommend that graduate level directed studies courses have an appropriate written agreement between instructor and student. The same rationales apply.

SCEP, therefore, concludes that:

The provision of syllabi for courses is a professional obligation:

1. The syllabus should be provided at the first meeting of class, electronically or on paper.

2. The syllabus is to include the name of the instructor of record and specify how grades will be computed, what the students are required to do during the semester, and the purposes of the course.

3. Changing readings or sequences of topics is not problematic so long as students have adequate notice of the modifications and are not penalized financially by the changes.

4. Directed study courses do not require syllabi. If there is no syllabus, there must be a written agreement between the student and the instructor that stipulates what will be accomplished during the semester and how it will be evaluated.

SCEP sees this as a requirement that many people assume is already in place; a requirement that supports effective instruction; and a requirement that diminished the potential for problems between faculty and students ranging from misunderstandings to unfairness.

With no discussion, a vote was taken and the motion was approved.