

Amended December 2, 2010

The fifteenth meeting of the Committee of Six for the academic year 2010-2011 was called to order by President Marx in his office at 1:00 P.M. on Friday, November 19, 2010. Present were Professors Basu, Ciepiela, Loinaz, Rockwell, Umphrey, and Saxton, Dean Call, President Marx, and Assistant Dean Tobin, Recorder.

The Committee turned to personnel matters.

Under "Questions from Committee Members," Professor Umphrey asked about the decision that had been made about the English department's request that the Creative Writing Program's Writer-in-Residence position be restructured from a rotating ongoing position to a permanent one. President Marx said that he has asked the English department to structure the Writer-in-Residence position as either a rotating or a tenure-track position, and informed the Committee that he has agreed to allow the current structure to continue for another two years while the department re-considers the organization of the Creative Writing Program. Professor Loinaz asked if a decision had been made about the request made by Professor Staller at the November 2 Faculty Meeting that the written statement that she had read aloud at the meeting be appended to the Faculty Meeting minutes. Dean Call said that, following regular practice, Professor Staller's statement would be summarized and included in the minutes. He said that he plans to contact her before the Faculty Meeting to convey this information.

Discussion turned to the letter and proposal ([appended via link](#)) from the College Council regarding the calendar for the Spring semester for the next several academic years. Professor Ciepiela noted that information is not included in the proposal about the intentions of the University and Mount Holyoke vis a vis the calendar after 2012. Dean Call said that it is his understanding that all of the Five College institutions are moving in the direction of the UMass calendar, with regard to the start of the Spring semester. According to the proposal, in the five out of seven years in which the university begins the Spring semester on the Tuesday after Martin Luther King Day, Amherst would start on Thursday of that week and would have Thursday and Friday and the next five days for an add/drop period. The first Friday would be treated as a Wednesday. The last Wednesday of the term would then count as a Friday. During the two years out of seven that the University begins on the Monday after Martin Luther King Day, Amherst would start on that day as well, and there would be an eight-day add/drop period and thus a second Wednesday would be included in add/drop period. Professor Umphrey asked if some Tuesday seminars meet only once a week and whether all classes meet more than once during add/drop. She wondered whether the proposal would exacerbate the problem of students having to make decisions about whether to keep a class after it had met only once during the add/drop period. The Dean said that his recollection is that Wednesday has more classes with once-a-week meeting times so that it is desirable to have two Wednesday meetings during add/drop. It was noted that the specific dates of spring break are not yet known in the coming years at some of the Five-College institutions. Professor Rockwell suggested that the Faculty vote on the proposal with the understanding that, by 2014, the Faculty would be asked to decide whether to accept the dates for spring break. Dean Call said that he expects that the breaks will be in sync among the schools. The Committee then voted six to zero to forward the calendar proposal to the Faculty.

Amended December 2, 2010

The Committee turned once again to personnel matters. President Marx left the meeting at 2:15 P.M.

Discussion turned to the letter and proposal ([appended via link](#)) from the Committee on Educational Policy (CEP) for an adjustment to the honors system. The change would grant magna cum laude honors to students who had received summa recommendations from their departments and whose G.P.A.s fell into the 25 to 40 percent range. Professor Rockwell expressed concern that all G.P.A. cut-offs are arbitrary, so that, no matter how they are adjusted, there will always be those who are unhappy and feel that an injustice is being done when a student comes close to the cut-off, but fails to reach it. Professor Ciepiela, who said that she is in favor of the proposal, noted that the adjustment is designed to address the nature of the penalty that has been in place when a student who has done summa-level thesis work, but then fails to meet the G.P.A. cut-off, falls to cum as a result. Professor Umphrey said that she supports the proposal and has observed that there is widespread unhappiness among the Faculty with the current cut-off. She feels that the proposal represents an appropriate response to a perceived injustice, and that it will affect a small number of students who just miss the cut-off and suffer a “two-notch” penalty. Dean Call said that the proposal, in his view, represents a reasonable compromise, while noting the problem of grade compression. Professor Basu said that she supports the proposal, as well.

Continuing the discussion of the CEP’s proposal, Professor Rockwell commented that he has the impression that there are discrepancies among departments in terms of the expectations for a summa thesis and recommendation, and that the proposal is inviting another form of grade inflation. Professor Saxton said that she supports the proposal, commenting that its adoption might lead to a more straightforward evaluation of theses. She noted that the CEP has said that only a small number of students would be affected by this change. Professor Umphrey noted that the problem of summa students dropping down to cum is quite visceral in her department, where most students write theses. Professor Loinaz expressed some distaste for any system of honors and wondered whether honors serve any useful purpose once a student leaves Amherst. He expressed the view that the rewards for doing an honors thesis should be intrinsic to the experience and should not require outside reinforcement. Professor Umphrey argued that law schools and graduate schools in some fields take honors into account when making admissions decisions. Professor Rockwell expressed the view that the cum designation has become devalued and should be seen as an honor, rather than as a punishment. Professor Umphrey reiterated that the drop from a summa to a cum is a substantial one. Dean Call suggested that a partial solution to grade compression is that the standard for summa could be raised.

Professor Ciepiela said that, while she would not advocate a re-imagining of the honors system (and the other members agreed), she would support this proposal as a “quick fix” and relatively minor change that could rectify the problem at hand. Professor Umphrey agreed, commenting that there is no perfect system, but that the proposal offers a helpful modification. Professor Rockwell said that he is not persuaded that this change is necessary, though he favors bringing the proposal before the Faculty for consideration and vote. Professor Basu commented that departments could explore how best to raise standards for theses, if there is a desire to

Amended December 2, 2010

strengthen the honors system at the College. She suggested that, if departments wish, they could institute requirements for honors students that could ensure that only the most capable students undertake honors-level work and that overall standards would be raised. The Committee voted four in favor (Professors Basu, Ciepiela, Saxton, and Umphrey) and two opposed (Professors Loinaz and Rockwell) on the substance of the honors system proposal (and the motion contained therein) and six in favor and zero opposed to forwarding the proposal to the Faculty.

The Committee reviewed proposals for new courses, asked the Dean to clarify one question with a colleague, and voted six to zero to forward the courses to the Faculty. The members then reviewed a draft agenda for the Faculty Meeting of December 7 and voted six to zero to forward it to the Faculty. Professor Umphrey suggested that the Committee should, perhaps, consider adding as a regular feature of Faculty Meeting agendas, occasional and very brief updates from major committees. She noted that such updates could be valuable as a communication vehicle for the Faculty and has seen this mechanism used as a feature of other colleges' agendas for faculty meetings. Dean Call said that it could be useful to think about this idea, including having committees offer short written reports that could serve as updates and be appended to agendas, in the context of considering whether Faculty Meetings should be held more regularly. Professor Umphrey said that she feels that these reports could offer an informative sense of what is going on across the landscape of the College. Professor Rockwell commented that he would be cautious about having ideas that had not been fully digested by a committee put forward through such reports. Professor Umphrey agreed that doing so could be problematic and wondered if the reports might focus on committees' completed work, for example. Dean Call said that he could imagine a handful of major committees, which constantly have matters before them and that meet regularly, reporting and inviting the Faculty's comments. The Committee agreed to explore at a future meeting whether this and other suggestions might enable Faculty Meetings to become more informative.

The meeting adjourned at 3:05 P.M.

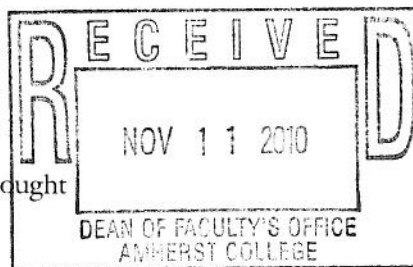
Respectfully submitted,

Gregory S. Call
Dean of the Faculty



AMHERST COLLEGE

Department of Law, Jurisprudence & Social Thought



LAWRENCE DOUGLAS
James J. Grosfeld Professor

5 November 2010

Dear Tony, Greg, and members of the Committee of Six:

Attached please find the College Council's proposed calendar for the next several academic years. Please note, the changes recommended only involve the second semester of each academic year; we were not asked to, nor did we, review the first term calendar. The proposed changes also only apply beginning in AY 2012, as the College has already voted in a calendar for AY 2011.

In drafting this proposal, we were guided by several considerations:

1. Maintain Five College cooperation and exchange by keeping our calendars roughly in synch.
2. Maintain a January term that permits seniors to do thesis research, faculty to pursue scholarly projects, and students to engage in internships and training programs (such as EMT).
3. Coordinate Spring Break with the other Five Colleges.
4. Preserve a meaningful reading period, and a senior week that permits faculty to complete senior grades.
5. Maintain a meaningful add/drop period.
6. Preserve the 14-week semester.

We believe our proposed calendar attends to these goals.

On those years that UMASS begins on the Monday after MLK Day, we will begin on that day, too. On those years that UMASS begins on the Tuesday directly following MLK Day, we propose starting on that Thursday. We make this proposal after having spoken to students and faculty, all of whom expressed concerns about shortening the January term too drastically. At the same time, we believe the Thursday start date wouldn't interfere with cross-registrations between the Five Colleges.

To make the Thursday start date work, we propose—and already we can hear the howls of execration—that the first Friday (i.e., the day directly after the Thursday start date) be treated as a Wednesday. Very few courses meet only on Friday, while many courses meet only on Wednesday (e.g., seminars), and so the flip would permit students to arrange their schedules early in add-drop. The last Wednesday of the term would then count as a Friday, so that the sciences would not lose a final lab. Once the initial irritation that such flips arouse wears off, we think our colleagues will accept the wisdom of the plan.

The calendar also contemplates either a seven- or an eight-day add/drop period, depending on the year (seven on those years that we begin on a Thursday, eight on those when we begin on a Monday). Here we were responding to widespread concerns from colleagues that a two-week add/drop was too long and thus disruptive.

We hope you find our proposal to your satisfaction.

Best,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'L. Douglas', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Lawrence Douglas
Chair, College Council

	2011 - ACCEPTED		2012		2013		2014		2015		2016	
	Day	Date	Day	Date	Day	Date	Date	Date	Day	Date	Day	Date
January 1st	Saturday	Jan. 1	Sunday	Jan. 1	Tuesday	Jan. 1	Wednesday	Jan. 1	Thursday	Jan. 1	Friday	Jan. 1
Start of January Term	Monday	Jan. 3	Tuesday	Jan. 3	Monday	Jan. 7	Monday	Jan. 6	Monday	Jan. 5	Monday	Jan. 4
End of January Term	Friday	Jan. 21	Friday	Jan. 20	Wednesday	Jan. 23	Wednesday	Jan. 22	Wednesday	Jan. 21	Wednesday	Jan. 20
Length of January Term	3 Weeks		1 day short of 3 weeks		2 days short of 3 weeks		2 days short of 3 weeks		2 days short of 3 weeks		2 days short of 3 weeks	
MLK Holiday	Monday	Jan. 17	Monday	Jan. 16	Monday	Jan. 21	Monday	Jan. 20	Monday	Jan. 19	Monday	Jan. 18
Start of Classes												
Amherst	Monday	Jan. 24	Monday	Jan. 23	Thursday	Jan. 24	Thursday	Jan. 23	Thursday	Jan. 22	Thursday	Jan. 21
Hampshire	Wednesday	Jan. 26	Wednesday	Feb. 1								
Mt. Holyoke	Wednesday	Jan. 26	Tuesday	Jan. 24	Tuesday	Jan. 22	Tuesday	Jan. 21	Tuesday	Jan. 20	Tuesday	Jan. 19
Smith	Monday	Jan. 24	Monday	Jan. 30								
UMass	Tuesday	Jan. 18	Monday	Jan. 23	Tuesday	Jan. 22	Tuesday	Jan. 21	Tuesday	Jan. 20	Tuesday	Jan. 19
Add/Drop												
Amherst Dates	M-W(8 days)	Jan. 24-Feb. 2	M-W (8 days)	Jan. 23-Feb. 1	Th-F (7 days)	Jan. 24-Feb. 1	Th-F (7 days)	Jan 23-31	Th-F (7 days)	Jan 22-30	Th-F (7 days)	Jan 21-9
UMass Dates/Overlap	8 day overlap		8 day overlap		7-day overlap		7-day overlap		7-day overlap		7-day overlap	
Spring Break												
Option One	MARCH 12-20			MARCH 19		MARCH 18		March 10		March 9		March 7
Option Two								March 17		March 16		March 14
Last Day of Classes												
Amherst	Friday	May 6	Friday	May 4	Wednesday	May 8	Wednesday	May 7	Wednesday	May 6	Wednesday	May 4
Hampshire	Friday	May 6	Friday	May 4								
Mt. Holyoke	Wed.	May 4	Mon.	Apr. 30	Monday	April 29		April 28				
Smith	Friday	April 29	Friday	May 4								
UMass	Tues.	May 3	Tues.	May 1	Wed.	May 1						
Reading Period		May 7-8		May 5-7		May 9-13		May 8-12		May 7-11		May 5-9
Exam Period		May 9-13		May 8-12		May 14-18		May 13-17		May 12-16		May 10-14
Senior Week		May 14-20		May 13-19		May 19-25		May 18-24		May 17-23		May 15-21
Commencement	<i>spans 2 weekends</i>		<i>spans 2 weekends</i>		<i>spans 3 weeks</i>		<i>spans 3 weekends</i>		<i>spans 3 weekends</i>		<i>spans 3 weekends</i>	
Amherst	Sunday	May 22	Sunday	May 20	Sunday	May 26	Sunday	May 25	Sunday	May 24	Sunday	May 22
Hampshire	Saturday	May 21	Saturday	May 19/26								
Mt. Holyoke	Sunday	May 22	Sunday	May 20	Sunday	May 19	Sunday	May 18	Sunday	May 17	Sunday	May 15
Smith	Sunday	May 15	Sunday	May 20								
UMass	Saturday	May 14	Saturday	May 12	Saturday	May 11	May 11					
Memorial Day	May 30		May 28		May 27		May 26		May 25		May 30	

November 5, 2010

The Committee of Six
Amherst College

Dear Colleagues:

I write on behalf of the Committee on Educational Policy to request that the Committee of Six consider and forward to the Faculty the following motion:

Effective with the class of 2011E, Latin honors for candidates with *summa cum laude* recommendations from their departments will be awarded as follows:

- Candidates in the top 25 percent of the graduating class will receive *summa cum laude* honors.
- Candidates in the top 40 percent of the graduating class, but not in the top 25 percent, will receive *magna cum laude* honors.
- Remaining candidates will receive *cum laude* honors.

Attached is a version of the current catalog language that has been modified to reflect this change.

Our proposal would change the honors level awarded to candidates who did *summa* thesis work and are in the 25 to 40 percent range in their class. They would receive *magna* honors instead of the *cum laude* honors specified by the current policy. In the last four years, an average of 3.0 students per year would have been affected by this change.

The CEP believes that this is a narrowly focused proposal that will remedy an injustice in the current system to students who do superior thesis work but barely miss the 25% cutoff. Instead of immediately dropping two honors levels, there would be a range of GPAs for which the drop would be only one level.

In 2007-08, the CEP reviewed the current honors system (which was instituted in 2004) and requested feedback from the academic departments. Faculty response to the current system varied widely, but the CEP identified two possible changes that had each been suggested by a number of departments:

1. Institute some system for granting exceptions to the GPA cutoffs under extraordinary circumstances.
2. Modify the GPA cutoff for *magna*, enlarging the number of students eligible for *magna*.

The two changes would both have worked, in different ways, to reduce the effect of cutoffs on students who did excellent thesis work but who had taken academic risks, had a single bad semester for reasons beyond their control, or had arrived at Amherst with less preparation.

After extensive discussions, the 2007-08 CEP felt that allowing exceptions would “introduce an unfair arbitrariness into the awarding of Latin honors” and did not pursue that option. It did

forward a proposal to the Committee of Six to change the cutoff for *magna* to 30%, which the Committee of Six discussed and decided was not sufficiently compelling to bring to the Faculty. One objection raised in both the CEP and the Committee of Six was that there would likely be more near misses at a 30% cutoff than at 25%, which might increase, not decrease, disappointment.

We agree with the objections raised three years ago to both of the possible changes above but remain concerned about the handling of students who have done thesis work at the highest level. The drop from *summa* to *cum laude* at the 25% cutoff seems extreme, especially given the possibility that grades can be affected if a student explores parts of the College curriculum beyond his or her usual expertise. We think that the College should reward students who take academic risks, and we fear that the current system does just the opposite.

Here is the data for 2007 through 2010 on students who were recommended by their departments for *summa* honors:

	Recommended for <i>summa</i>	Top 25%	25-40%	Remainder
2010	27	21	2	4
2009	36	27	5	4
2008	35	27	5	3
2007	25	21	0	4

Under our proposed change, an average of 3.0 students per year (the 25-40% column) would have received a higher level of honors, and 3.75 would have remained at the *cum laude* level. During this same period, an average of 49 students per year earned *magna* honors by doing a *magna* thesis and meeting the 25% cutoff.

There are ways in which our proposal could be varied. The 40% cutoff could be higher or lower, but we think it probably provides the right step between *summa* and *cum laude*. The change could be delayed so that it doesn't apply immediately, but we see no reason to wait. The implementation language that is attached could be modified. We do hope that you will approve our proposal and can bring it to the Faculty soon, perhaps at the December meeting. We stand ready, of course, to answer any questions or respond to any suggestions that you may have.

In summary, we believe that, by offering a step between *summa* and *cum laude* honors for students who have done excellent thesis work, we can create an honors system that uses grades in a more balanced way. Only a few students will be affected, so there will be only a modest effect on the overall numbers of students receiving different levels of honors.

Best regards,

Lyle A. McGeoch, Chair
Chair, Committee on Educational Policy

Anthony Bishop
Gregory S. Call
Javier Corrales
Heidi Gilpin

Pranay Kirpalani
Rose Lenehan
Rick Lopez
Andreas Shepard

PROPOSED MODIFICATION TO HONORS ELIGIBILITY, AS SPECIFIED ON PAGE 76 OF THE 2010-11 AMHERST COLLEGE CATALOG.

DEGREE WITH HONORS

The requirements for graduation with a degree with honors are as follows: The degree Bachelor of Arts with Honors is awarded at graduation to students whose academic records give evidence of particular merit. Latin Honors are awarded to students completing a thesis within their major department or program. English honors are awarded to students solely on the basis of performance in course work. The awarding of both Latin and English honors will be made by the Faculty of the College, and will appear on the diploma. In making such awards, the Faculty will observe the following guidelines:

Latin Honors

1. Candidates eligible for the degree *summa cum laude* must have a minimum overall grade point average in the top 25% of their class and have received a recommendation of *summa* based on a thesis or comparable work from a department or program in which they have majored. In addition, the theses of candidates for the degree *summa cum laude* will be reviewed by the Committee of Six, who will transmit its recommendation to the Faculty. Candidates will also have their entire records reviewed by the Dean of the Faculty and the Committee of Six, who will transmit their recommendations to the Faculty.

2. Candidates eligible for the degree *magna cum laude* must have a minimum overall grade point average in the top 25% of their class and have received a recommendation of *magna* based on a thesis or comparable work from a department or program in which they have majored. Although each department or program may define additional criteria upon which it will base its recommendation, the candidate must submit a thesis or comparable work that is judged by the department or program to be of *magna* quality.

CANDIDATES WILL ALSO QUALIFY FOR THE DEGREE MAGNA CUM LAUDE IF THEY ARE IN THE TOP 40%, BUT NOT THE TOP 25%, OF THEIR CLASS AND HAVE OTHERWISE MET THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE SUMMA CUM LAUDE.

3. Candidates eligible for the degree *cum laude* must have received a recommendation of *cum* based on a thesis or comparable work from a department or program in which they have majored. Although each department or program may define additional criteria upon which it will base its recommendation, the candidate must submit a thesis or comparable work that is

judged by the department or program to be of *cum* quality.

Distinction

Candidates eligible for a degree with Distinction must have an overall grade point average in the top 25% of their class.