

May 17, 2023

Dear Colleagues,

It has been another busy year for the Committee on Educational Policy (CEP), and in this letter we will summarize the highlights of our discussions and accomplishments. This year the committee's membership included Rob Benedetto (chair), Sandi Burkett (in Fall '22), Mekhola Gomes, Dave Hanneke (who joined in Spring 2023 when Sandi's sabbatical began), Chris Kingston, Geoff Sanborn; our student members Isaiah Doble '25, Zane Khiry '25, and Gent Malushaga '25; Catherine Epstein, *ex officio*; and of course Nancy Ratner, who, besides taking our minutes, does so much marvelous work to help the committee function smoothly.

### **Courses**

One of the CEP's principal tasks is the vetting of course proposals. This year, the committee received, reviewed, and approved 209 such proposals, of which 164 were new courses and 45 were either revived courses (i.e., courses that had not been offered for several years) or major revisions of existing courses. Several concerns that have been part of the committee's discussions in recent years continued to raise members concerns about obstacles to student access to the open curriculum, among them:

- Imbalance of upper-level vs introductory-level courses
- Low-capped courses
- Courses meeting only once per week
- Co-teaching of courses, especially at the upper level

Naturally, members agreed that there is a need for advanced courses, for courses with low caps, etc. But as in previous years, there were concerns about the proportions of courses in some departments with features like those above. It was noted that departments with higher ratios of students to FTE lines tended to have fewer or no such courses, implying on the one hand that such course features do indeed raise barriers to students' access to the open curriculum, and on the other hand that there is inequity across departments, allowing opportunities for more academic intimacy in some departments than in others. These issues will surely continue to appear prominently in CEP discussions in future years.

### **FTEs**

Another of the CEP's principal tasks is the review of departmental FTE requests. After inviting such requests in the committee's annual Fall letter to departments, the CEP received 16 requests from 11 departments, including two for the newly created FTE in Race and American Law. As always, the committee valued both curricular needs and numerical needs, in order to field a broad array of courses while also valuing small class sizes across the college. Although FTE lines do not "belong" to departments, in that a department does not necessarily get a replacement line when a colleague retires or otherwise leaves the college, such vacancies were noted in the committee's discussions, due to the curricular and numerical needs they often engender.

After approving four target-of-opportunity hires (three successful ones in Mathematics, to replace departing colleagues, and an unsuccessful one in Computer Science), the committee recommended that the administration authorize the following ten searches: in American Studies (and specifically for the Education Studies program), Computer Science, Economics (two: one in international trade, and one in macroeconomics), History (in medieval and early modern Europe), LJST (for the Race and American Law position), Mathematics, Sociology (with a focus on quantitative methodology), Spanish (in Latin American studies), and Theater and Dance (in dance).

## **Latin Honors**

In September, the CEP sent the FEC a proposal for a major revision to the Latin Honors policy. The policy had been created through the work of the previous year's CEP, building on the discussions of the CEP from the year before that. In particular, the current 2022-23 CEP did not make any changes to the proposal, which came from the 2021-22 CEP. However, the members responded to questions from the FEC about the proposal, and later spoke to the policy at faculty meetings during the course of the academic year. The policy, with its new *median* grade requirement and *breadth* requirement for summa and magna honors, were approved by the faculty early in the Spring 2023 semester. All honors students through the class of 2027 will receive the higher of the two honors levels they would have received under the old and new policies. After that, only the new Latin honors policy will apply.

Given the late date of approval, after students in the class of 2023 had finalized their course selections for Spring 2023, it was suggested to the committee that members of the class of 2023, and only that class, be allowed to reclassify cross-listed courses they had taken in one department according to a different label, if it would help them meet the breadth requirement. After confirming the logistical feasibility of this suggestion with the registrar's office, the CEP approved this one-time exception.

## **Academic Calendar**

As noted in previous reports, there is a hope to return to proposing three-year calendars rather than planning one year at a time, but circumstances again did not permit such longer-term planning. In particular, the calendar at the University of Massachusetts continues to be in flux, as they balance their new six-week winter term and their faculty senate and staff needs. This year, in particular, the UMass faculty senate did not approve their 2023-24 calendar until mid-October of 2022, and they have not yet set plans for years beyond that. Given the significant changes to their calendar in the past two years, and given the need for coordination within the Five Colleges, the committee agreed it would be unwise to plan more than one year at a time until a more stable model has become clear going forward.

Several principles guided the committee's calendar planning. There is need for reasonable alignment with the other colleges, for ending the Fall exam period early enough that travel costs are not exorbitant for students who must stay to the end, for keeping the college closed on federal holidays (bearing in mind staff needs, for example), and for maintaining a four-day

Fall weekend, four-day April vacation, week-long Thanksgiving break, and a Spring break aligning with the UMass Spring break. In Fall 2023, Labor Day falls on Monday, September 4, allowing a traditional start date of the following Tuesday (September 5), with a single “Wednesday is Monday” shift in the week of Fall Break, and without having to hold classes before Labor Day; but the Fall exam period had to include weekend days in order to end by December 21. (However, in future years, when Labor Day again occurs later, it will likely be necessary to hold classes on some days in the week before.)

### **Pass/Fail Policy**

The committee discussed and recommended changes to the Pass/Fail policy, with the intention of steering its usage away from GPA-management back to exploration of the curriculum and as an escape valve for struggling students. Various options were considered, and the committee consulted with the class deans and the Registrar’s office in order to balance conflicting needs and to avoid unintended side effects. The committee therefore decided to make some relatively modest changes intended to discourage more frivolous uses of Pass/Fail declarations without raising difficult obstacles for students who truly need them. The changes were as follows:

- Permission must be obtained from **both** the course instructor and the student’s advisor(s), as opposed to just the advisor(s).
- Permission must be granted via a physical signature on a paper form submitted to the registrar’s office.
- The student’s class dean (along with the advisor and instructor) would be notified when a Pass/Fail request is filed.

No changes were made to the deadline (before the first day of exam period) or to the limits (no more than one per semester, and no more than four in total).

### **Daytime Faculty Meeting**

Late in the Fall 2022 semester, the CEP received an urgent request from the FEC to find options for a slot for faculty meetings within the traditional 9am-to-5pm Monday-to-Friday workweek that would be curricularly feasible. The FEC confirmed that the CEP should keep this meeting time separate from discussions of a potential community hour (an idea which had arisen in past conversations about a daytime faculty meeting), and more broadly that the CEP should focus only on curricular considerations. The committee investigated what a number of peer institutions do, and found they fell into three general categories: either limiting faculty meetings to no more than 50 minutes each, or running them roughly 4pm to 6pm sometime mid-week, or else running them late on Friday afternoons. The committee then consulted department chairs about the curricular implications of a Friday afternoon faculty meeting slot. After receiving feedback that, from a curricular standpoint, Friday afternoons would be the most feasible, and furthermore that Friday at 2pm or 2:30pm would raise significantly more obstacles than Friday at 3pm, the CEP replied to the FEC that a Friday 3pm-to-5pm timeslot was the only current option within the specified parameters.

## Other Policies

The committee also discussed various other policy proposals:

- The committee proposed adding language to the Faculty Handbook emphasizing that faculty are expected to hold all scheduled classes, and when that is not possible, the work should be made up somehow (substitute instructor, remote teaching, recorded lectures, or other asynchronous work), but not for more than two weeks normally. If extraordinary circumstances mean that more than two weeks are needed (e.g. extended illness), instructors should be in touch with chair of the department to make other arrangements for the teaching of their classes.
- The committee received and discussed a letter from the Committee on Academic Standing (CAS) about the Independent Scholars program. The CEP agreed with the CAS's argument that the policy surrounding this program needs updating, and several CEP members wondered whether the program should continue to exist at all. The CEP decided to ask CAS to make a recommendation to CEP about whether this program should continue or be abolished.
- The committee discussed the comprehensive evaluation policy, given the wide variance of implementation across majors, including a significant number that have no comprehensive requirement other than the required coursework for the major. The members of the committee had a wide enough spectrum of opinions that it was decided not to try to develop proposed changes at the time, which was by then late in the Spring 2023 semester.
- In response to a request from a colleague, the committee discussed the policy prohibiting seniors from withdrawing from a course overload partway through their final semester. After consulting with the class deans, and taking into account factors like private music lessons – which are sometimes dropped midsemester, leaving that instructor hanging – the committee decided to make no changes to the current policy.
- The CEP discussed a preliminary proposal from the Ad Hoc Committee on Student Learning about modifying and simplifying the course credit policy, to simplify policies surrounding the numbers of half courses and full courses required for graduation. The members reacted positively to the ideas being developed and encouraged Jesse Barba (and the Ad Hoc Committee, if it continues to meet) to develop a full proposal along those lines.

## Other Items

Other non-policy items that came before the committee included the following:

- In response to a request, the CEP again reviewed the report on J-term. Given the significant logistical issues involved, especially those reported by staff, the committee again came to the conclusion that it would not be possible to repeat a system for offering for-credit courses in J-term unless and until there is a new proposal introduced that would somehow eliminate the inherent obstacles.
- The CEP declined a proposal to introduce a keyword-scraping tool intended to score courses on sustainability themes, in light of a number of concerns both about

incorporating external factors into the academic advising process, and about the accuracy of the specific tool itself.

- The committee also declined a proposal to split an existing course tag/keyword into two new ones. There is already a significant amount of confusion involving distinctions between certain keywords, and several members were concerned that further subdivisions of the many keywords would create further confusion.
- The committee declined a proposal from the Film and Media Studies program to become a department. Committee members expressed multiple concerns about the proposal, most related to the size of the resulting proposed department, both internally and externally, in terms of what that precedent would mean for other departments and programs around the college.
- The committee met with the external review committee for the History department.
- The committee approved a department change request from a colleague. The relevant departments had signed off on the request.

# **REPORT TO THE FACULTY OF AMHERST COLLEGE**

**MAY 2022**

## **COMMITTEE ON EDUCATIONAL POLICY**

**Robert Benedetto**

**Sandra Burkett, chair**

**Nicola Courtright**

**Isaiah Doble '25 (2021)**

**Dania Hallak '24 (2022)**

**Nicolas Graber-Mitchell '22**

**Christopher Kingston (2022)**

**Jaden Richards '25 (2022)**

**Geoffrey Sanborn**

**Adam Sitze (2021)**

**Jalen Woodard '23 (2021)**

*This year the Committee on Educational Policy addressed a mix of the regular work of the committee, immediate questions and needs that arose throughout the year, and larger-scale and longer-term projects and policies.*

## **FTEs**

Evaluating FTE requests always dominates the committee's spring meetings, and this year was no different. The process began in September, when the committee sent a letter to department chairs requesting proposals for FTEs and explaining the committee's priorities for evaluating requests. This year's letter also invited proposals for potential cluster hires that would be likely to attract scholars of diverse backgrounds. In early December, the committee received 16 requests from 11 departments, including two three-FTE cluster requests, one in the broad field of Asian American studies and one in the broad field of Afro-Caribbean and Latinx culture. The committee subsequently received and approved three additional requests for target-of-opportunity hires. In making this year's recommendations, the committee was particularly mindful of two curricular needs at the college: the need to respond to the increase in STEM enrollments and the need for students to be able to study their many different identities and experiences within the curriculum. The final rankings for both regular and cluster hires reflect these priorities. In addition to two successful target-of-opportunity hires (Art and History of Art, Physics and Astronomy), this year's FTE review resulted in searches authorized next year for FTEs to replace faculty in four departments (Chemistry, LJST, Math, Theater and Dance) and to expand the number of faculty in six departments (Computer Science, Economics, English, LJST, Math, Psychology). Half of these expansion positions are a cluster in Asian American Studies (Economics, English, Psychology).

## **New and revised courses**

The CEP approves courses during both semesters, with the largest number of new and revised course approvals occurring in the spring semester. In the process of reviewing 164 course proposals this year, the committee began to focus on how decisions by departments can impede student access to the open curriculum. The committee believes that many practices must change, as described below. The committee expects to prioritize these issues early in the next academic year and to propose some changes.

In particular, the CEP believes that course-scheduling practices that inhibit course exploration are not consistent with an open curriculum. Too many courses—especially courses in the humanities and social and behavioral sciences—overlap in a small number of time slots, particularly on Tuesdays, Wednesdays, and Thursdays between 10 a.m. and 2 p.m. The committee also thinks that once-a-week seminars should be restricted to the least congested time blocks. In the fall the CEP plans to explore possible changes to how courses are scheduled.

The committee believes that students learn better if courses meet frequently and has begun to intervene when courses below the 400-level are proposed to meet just one day per week. The CEP will examine these issues more thoroughly and systematically in the fall.

The committee is particularly concerned about how low enrollment caps on courses limit exploration of the curriculum. In the fall the CEP will examine the pattern of course caps across all courses in all departments, and it has already begun to encourage higher caps, especially for courses offered at the introductory level.

The committee also reviewed the new sophomore seminar offerings and approved a keyword identifying the seminars and a clear statement describing their purpose. Students will need to understand the goal of the sophomore seminars, know the rules vis-à-vis applying the sophomore seminars to their major, and easily identify sophomore seminar offerings, which will be part of the curriculum for the first time in the fall.

### **Academic calendar**

The committee developed multiple academic calendars for the coming year, revising the calendar repeatedly in response to changes made by the University of Massachusetts. In each iteration, the committee prioritized creating a calendar that would both maximize the number of full weeks of class and also allow the exam period in December to end before travel costs become exorbitant. The final calendar, which was approved by the faculty, has the added benefit that it provides two breaks in each semester. The committee decided to delay proposing a three-year calendar until there has been a more extensive conversation about the future of January term, and until the committee has a better sense of the intentions of the other schools in the consortium. Significant changes to the University of Massachusetts calendar are already becoming apparent.



## **Policy matters**

### *Online teaching*

At the request of the provost and dean of the faculty, the committee discussed and designed a policy to govern the use of online and remote teaching at Amherst. The committee recommended allowing remote teaching on a limited basis to address exigencies. The committee also concluded that online teaching should be viewed not as a convenience, but rather as a temporary device that allows faculty to continue teaching under circumstances that otherwise would necessitate canceling class.

### *Study away policy*

The committee reviewed and approved a revised study away policy that would allow students to study away during their senior year if their study away plans had been disrupted by the pandemic. The committee was satisfied by the robust steps that the Global Education Office had put in place to govern this temporary policy but opposed this becoming a permanent revision to the study away policy.

### *Class attendance policy*

Last spring, the Black Students Union (BSU) had petitioned the college for a more flexible class attendance policy to cover situations in which students were under extreme mental stress. Ultimately, the committee preferred retaining the current system in which students are expected to approach the instructor about a brief absence and to contact the Office of Student Affairs if they require a longer absence. The committee has not recommended a change in policy.

### *Intensive writing policy*

The new director of the intensive writing program proposed a new definition of intensive writing (IW) courses to help faculty and students understand the purpose of these courses. The committee reviewed this policy and supported the substance of the proposed definition but returned it for clarification of some details.

## **External department reviews**

The CEP typically meets with external review committees. This year that included meetings with those reviewing the Psychology department and the Russian Center.

## **Latin honors**

Continuing a process that began in 2020-21, the committee spent a considerable amount of time in the fall and spring discussing the current system of Latin honors and alternative structures. The committee examined data on Latin honors, grade inflation, policy changes, and faculty and student dissatisfaction with current policy. In an attempt to balance the role of the department in awarding Latin honors and the role of Latin honors as a college award, the committee decided that, while the department should continue to decide the level of honors that a student's thesis represents, the eligibility for both *magna* and *summa* degrees should be based on two college-wide criteria: median grade and a modest breadth requirement. The goal of these proposed changes is twofold: to make the process of determining Latin honors more transparent and equitable, and to implicitly encourage the exploration of the curriculum. Using median grade rather than average grade (GPA) would allow a student to receive low grades in over a dozen courses and still have a very high median grade, thus eliminating the significance of outlier grades. The breadth requirement of one course in each of four subject categories is intended to signal that the college's definition of excellence in coursework, and hence *magna* or *summa* honors, should include the willingness to explore unfamiliar intellectual and/or creative fields. The committee hopes that the Faculty Executive Committee and the faculty will discuss this proposal in the fall.

## **January term**

The committee briefly reviewed the recommendations of the ad hoc committee that examined the January term and concluded that no further action by the CEP is necessary at the moment. If the Faculty Executive Committee decides to explore a future pilot of a January term, the committee will return to those recommendations at that time.

## **Advising tools in Workday**

The committee discussed the advising tools that will be available in Workday. While these tools fall short of what was desired, the committee accepted the necessity of moving forward with a new system and hopes that Workday will continue to make changes that will support Amherst advising.

## **Changes to Statistics major**

The committee approved changes to the statistics major.



May 21, 2021

Dear colleagues,

As you are well aware, the 2020-21 Academic Year has been an extremely challenging one for our college community. In light of these exceptional circumstances, I am proud of how much the Committee on Educational Policy (CEP) has been able to accomplish on multiple fronts. To that end, I want to begin this report by thanking Nancy Ratner and my fellow committee members—Sandi Burkett; Nicola Courtright; Catherine Epstein, *ex officio*; Nicolas Graber-Mitchell ('22); Robert Parker ('21); Krupa Shandilya; Adam Sitze; and Jalen Woodard ('23)—for their tenacity and efficiency.

The following list details some of the many issues that the CEP addressed during the past academic year:

- Reviewed the FGO and recommended replacing it with a simpler Pass/Fail policy.
- Approved the Education Studies Program.
- Added a section to course proposals requiring course expectations.
- Reviewed the January-term experience.
- Approved a new class meeting schedule with evening hours.
- Recommended changes to readmission rules (no readmission following a third academic dismissal; If students return to Amherst after a voluntary transfer to another institution, they cannot receive credits toward graduation for work completed while attending other institutions of higher education).
- Recommended changes to degree requirements (rules for half credit courses, make-up courses, retaking a course, dropping a course while studying in an approved program abroad, reduced course load for students, withdrawing from a course).



- Approved changes to the website to improve navigability when searching for courses (keyword for courses that require no prior experience).
- Reviewed grade-inflation data.
- Reviewed the Latin Honors program.
- Introduced a new cluster-hiring program to increase faculty diversity.
- Approved changes to the intensive writing program.
- Approved changes to the educational leave policy.
- Reviewed and approved 106 proposals for new courses and 52 courses with major revisions.
- Reviewed and ranked requests for faculty FTEs.
- Approved changes in the department affiliation of several faculty.
- Met with the Black Student Union and responded to their concerns about attendance policies and excused absences at the college.
- Recommended moving from the 14-point GPA scale to a 4-point or 4.3-point scale.

**Among this list, five policy recommendations were the most consequential for the college:**

- 1) Our recommendations to Provost Epstein and President Martin about FTE requests and cluster hires.
- 2) Our endorsement of the Education Studies Program.
- 3) Our recommendation that the college replace the Flexible Grading Option (or FGO) with a pass/fail option.
- 4) Our letter to the Black Student Union about the attendance and excused absence policies at the college.
- 5) Our recommendation that the college move from the 14-point GPA scale to a 4-point or 4.33-point scale.



In the section that follows, I address these five issues in greater detail.

**1. FTE Requests & the cluster hire initiative:**

This year, in an initiative designed to attract scholars from more diverse backgrounds, the CEP invited requests both for traditional FTE replacement and expansion lines, and we also invited proposals for open-rank cluster hires in fields that would be likely to attract a more diverse population of candidates. The FTEs for these cluster hires would come from either the three remaining senior hires available for Black and Latinx faculty or from FTE lines that are or will become available in the coming year.

In response to the traditional solicitation, the CEP received eleven requests for new and replacement FTEs from ten departments: Biology, Black Studies, Computer Science, English, French, German, History, Physics and Astronomy, Psychology, and Theater and Dance. The Theater and Dance request addressed the area of a previous search (someone who was denied reappointment).

In response to the cluster hire initiative, the CEP received three proposals: Anthropology/Sociology; Chemistry and Physics/Astronomy; and Law, Jurisprudence and Social Thought. The committee ultimately moved the Black Studies' and English Departments' joint request for a cluster hire from regular requests to a cluster request.

The committee also received target-of-opportunity requests from five departments: Biology, Black Studies/Political Science, Black Studies/History, Geology, and History for two senior diversity hires.

The criteria used by the committee to rank regular requests did not vary appreciably from previous years. These included whether the position was considered a replacement or an expansion to the department, whether the area represented a new direction or a continuation of the curriculum, enrollment demands, college-wide concerns, long-range plans, advice from an external review committee, evidence that the department had given careful thought to the different constituencies that the department serves



and how the shape of the major serves those different constituencies, the outcome of previous requests, and whether a department could fulfill its goals in its current state and provide adequate support for a diverse student body.

The committee was particularly mindful of two curricular needs at the college: the need to respond to the increase in STEM enrollments and the need for students to be able to study their many different identities and experiences in the curriculum. The rankings for both regular and cluster hires reflect these concerns.

### *Recommendations*

The committee recommended that FTEs be awarded to the following departments: Anthropology and Sociology (1 junior and 1 senior hire), Biology (1 TO), Black Studies and English (2 junior, 1 senior hire), Black Studies and History (2 senior diversity TOs), Black Studies and Political Science (TO, hired), Computer Science (1), Geology (TO, hired), History (unsuccessful TO), Physics and Astronomy (1), Theater and Dance (1).

## **2. Education Studies Program:**

Initially, the CEP had received a proposal for the creation of an Education Studies major in the Spring of 2018 from the Education Studies Working Group. This document outlined the interdisciplinary field of Education Studies, which provides a context for students to critically examine the history, purpose, politics, and consequences of education in a manner that is consistent with the liberal arts tradition. Over the past two years, the CEP had recommended a number of changes to the proposal and had asked for explicit commitments from supporting departments that would ensure the continuation of staffing commitments for such a program. After receiving letters of support from all of the relevant departments, at our September 16, 2020 meeting, CEP members were unanimous in voting to endorse this program. The faculty subsequently voted in favor of the program as well.



### 3. The Flexible Grading Option and the pass/fail policy

The CEP first took up the idea of the Flexible Grading Option (FGO) in October of 2018, following a faculty-wide discussion about a range of policies that might promote more risk-taking in students' course selection. By giving students five days after the date grades are due to either accept the grade assigned by the instructor, or, in the case of passing grades ("D" or better), elect to have a pass ("P") displayed on their transcript for the course, the CEP hoped to encourage exploration of Amherst's open curriculum. As the CEP minutes of October 24, 2018 noted: "Most [committee members] thought a later date would encourage more experimentation, although some wondered if a later date would simply lead to more attempts to game the system."

Unfortunately, some of those apprehensions were realized in the evidence that the CEP heard over the past two semesters from members of the dean's office, members of the faculty, and students who serve as representatives on our committee. The FGO did not succeed for two primary reasons: 1) it was too complicated a policy instrument for the problem it was trying to solve, and 2) the on-the-ground reality was that the deans were having to use the FGO to rescue students, hence the multiple exceptions granted.

The CEP welcomed Deans Clotfelter and López to our meeting on February 12, 2020 to share their concerns about the FGO policy. As the minutes from that meeting record, "Rick López noted that the FGO policy is so complicated that both faculty advisors and their student advisees find it confusing. As a result, it is favoring students who can game the system and not helping those who may most need it." Likewise, "Ethan Clotfelter said students had raised a host of exceptional circumstances to justify a late conversion of a course to an FGO." CEP members—across two different CEPs—tried to edit the policy, but we found new holes emerging with every possible stopgap measure in our patchwork of potential solutions. The pandemic put additional pressures on a policy that is prone to creating exceptional circumstances.





When the faculty voted to approve the FGO in the 2018-19 academic year, it also voted that the CEP would assess this policy annually over the next four years, it would report its findings to the faculty, and that the faculty would revisit and re-vote its approval at the end of this period or revise this policy. We proposed a return to a slightly modified version of the college's longstanding pass/fail policy, and the faculty voted in support of that change.

**4. Letter to the Black Student Union about the attendance and excused absence policies at Amherst College (I have included the complete text of the letter below):**

May 11, 2021

Dear members of the Black Student Union,

As requested, the Committee on Educational Policy (CEP) has been discussing the BSU demands, but our members have not yet reached resolution on amending the Faculty Handbook. All of the members of the CEP feel it is essential to respond to the BSU and the Amherst College community as soon as possible, so we share this statement of support. We address students and faculty alike.

The members of the CEP believe that the College's teaching mission encompasses generous understanding of students who are suffering. We are aware that political events can have powerful and differentiated impacts on different groups in our community, as well as on the community as a whole. We acknowledge and empathize with the sense of loss and the experience of mourning that Black students are feeling in the face of so much death, in particular the ongoing killing of Black people by public authorities. Many faculty members are also shaken and feel great grief as well.

In the face of a crisis, many faculty members choose to continue with their educational efforts not out of callous indifference to the cruelty and inequality of the world around us, but because faculty believe that the education they are providing is a crucial part of remedying that world's cruelty and inequality.

Often, if faculty appear to be strict in their attendance policies, it is not because they are hardened or punitive



but because their good-faith dedication to their area of expertise has convinced them that such a policy is essential to achieving the best possible education.

To the Amherst College faculty, we say that students need to know how much you care, and that a time of great loss is a particularly important moment to discover or invent still deeper ways and means of expressing care. The CEP thus urges faculty to communicate with students and to be flexible to accommodate crises that arise in students' lives.

The CEP is reluctant to interfere with an instructor's pedagogy, which may not make it possible for a student to make up a class he or she has missed or hand in work later than a deadline. Instructors have varied, valid means of accommodating students' needs to achieve the teaching goals of a course. Faculty should share their pedagogical principles and goals with their students, and students should likewise communicate with their instructor about how they might achieve the learning objectives of the course in the event of a missed class or work.

The CEP will continue discussion on this topic in the Fall, when we reconvene.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "E.S. Melillo".

Professor Edward Melillo

Chair, Committee on Educational Policy

Committee Members

Sandi Burkett

Nicola Courtright

Catherine Epstein, ex officio

Nicolas Graber-Mitchell ('22)

Robert Parker ('21)

Krupa Shandilya

Adam Sitze

Jalen Woodard ('23)



**5. Our recommendation to move from the 14-point GPA scale to a 4-point or 4.33-point scale.**

After much review, the CEP strongly supported moving the college away from a 14-point grade scale to a 4.0 or 4.33 grade scale. Because of the college's timing for the implementation of Workday, the Spring of 2021 offered an appropriate juncture at which to make this transition. Such a shift puts us in line with the grade scales of most of our peer institutions and reduces the unevenness and confusion that a 14-point grade scale creates for outward-facing aspects of GPA use (for example, NCAA requirements and many professional school applications). We recommended that a motion be brought to the faculty in favor of such a change. This motion passed at the May 18, 2021 Faculty Meeting

Secondly, CEP members felt that the issue of what will become of the A+ grade at Amherst College was a substantive change, which required careful thought and deliberation. Whether the A+ grade at the college would remain a factor in calculating a student's GPA or would become a purely honorific grade are crucial considerations. Our members concurred that the faculty needed to reflect on two issues: the role of the A+ at the college, and the role of GPA at the college. We advised that the faculty engage in a structured discussion of these matters at the May 18, 2021 Faculty Meeting.

This discussion occurred, and the faculty voted in favor of a motion to move the college to a 4.0-grade scale, which effectively made the A+ grade honorific.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "E.D. Melillo".

Professor Edward Melillo

Chair, Committee on Educational Policy (2019-21)



May 18, 2020

Dear colleagues,

As Chair of the Committee on Educational Policy (CEP), I write to summarize this committee's activities during the 2019-20 academic year. It was a busy year, long before the move to remote teaching disrupted the normal flow of activities across the campus.

As is always the case, we spent much of our time reviewing new course proposals, asking department chairs for amendments where appropriate, and preparing these proposals for review by the faculty. After receiving FTE letters throughout the fall, the committee spent many of our winter sessions considering these requests and providing our recommendations to President Martin. We also addressed several target-of-opportunity hiring requests and provided guidance to the administration on these matters. In February, CEP members participated in two external reviews, one for the English Department and the other for the Writing Center.

Other items that our committee discussed over the past eight months year included: protocol surrounding teaching evaluations; Curricular Practical Training (CPT), a form of work authorization specific to international students in F-1 status; the timing and implementation of the Flexible Grading Option (FGO) and the pass/fail option; half courses and their implications for other aspects of the college curriculum; the college's study abroad, transfer-back, and withdrawal policies; the Summer Data Science LACOL course; the intensive-writing program; accessibility services; and proposals from the Education Studies Working Group and the Film & Media Studies Department. Throughout many of these discussions, the class deans were extremely helpful in providing guidance to us about the successes and difficulties that they have experienced in implementing policies voted on by the faculty.

I conclude with a heartfelt thanks to my fellow committee members: Catherine Epstein (*ex officio*), Tekla Harms, Christian Rogowski, Krupa Shandilya, and Adam Sitze. I would also like to thank our dedicated student representatives: Jae Yun Ham, Sterling Kee, and Cole Graber-Mitchell. As always, Director of Academic Projects Nancy Ratner kept the administrative machinery of this committee in fine working order throughout a turbulent academic year.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "E.D. Melillo". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "E.D." being more distinct than the last name "Melillo".

Edward D. Melillo, Professor  
Departments of History and Environmental Studies  
Amherst College

**Report from the Committee on Education Policy (CEP), May 2019  
(Submitted by Catherine Sanderson, Chair of CEP)**

The CEP spent considerable time during the 2018-2019 academic year discussing new policies and revisions to existing policies. These included:

- a conflict of interest policy regarding faculty teaching family members
- a policy regarding students' ability to record classes
- a policy on special topics courses
- a policy on collecting and storing digital versions of theses
- a clarification of the policy on extensions and end-of-semester work
- a policy on giving credit for half courses, including for lab courses
- a military activation policy
- a lecturer policy
- a change in policy regarding the deadline for withdrawing from the college

The CEP also reviewed and discussed at length 12 (not including BLST) FTE requests from 9 different departments. Based on our review of these requests, we ultimately recommended the approval of 6 to the administration, and provided feedback to all departments on their requests. The CEP also reviewed and endorsed 2 target-of-opportunity hires.

The CEP also approved various changes or updates to the curriculum. These included a revision to the Dartmouth engineering program and an approval of the Five College Certificate in Biomathematics. We also reviewed the pre-registration pilot system put in place three years ago – which instituted two rounds of pre-registration – and recommended continuing this procedure.

The CEP discussed at length various proposals that emerged from the Curriculum Committee, and passed on our recommendations to the Committee of Six. These included advising recommendations, expansion of the number of pass/fail courses (from 2 to 4) and a new FGO policy, and a college seminars proposal.

## Report from the Committee on Education Policy (CEP) of 2017-2018 Activities

The CEP's work this year focused on three major areas.

First, we evaluated the merits of FTE requests. This year this included responding to 19 FTE requests, 2 failed searches, 6 target-of-opportunity requests, 3 senior diversity FTE proposals, and a partial FTE to convert a half-time FTE to a full FTE.

Second, we evaluated course proposals, including the clarity of description, restrictions (class size and selection criteria), and scheduling (number of times a week). This year we reviewed 162 course proposals.

Third, we evaluated various academic policies. Our policy work this year included:

- Recommended changing faculty access to students' transcripts
- Reviewed proposals from the Ad Hoc Curriculum Committee to change pass/fail, adopt minors, get rid of triple majors, and allow half course credit for science labs
- Examined issues of class bunching by departments and potential solutions
- Reviewed the course evaluation form for tenured faculty and deadline for responses
- Reviewed field trip policies (scheduling policy, risk management policy)
- Approved a Five College Certificate in Reproductive Health, Rights, Justice.
- Met with External Review committee for Biology, and with the NEASC committee (or a subcommittee).
- Discussed the Educational Studies proposal in its planning stage.
- Discussed policies on accommodations for students.
- Recommended new ways for first year students to register for classes in the fall semester to mitigate the "first-come, first-served" problem that had caused some students who were unlucky enough to be scheduled later in the day to not get any of their preferred courses.