

## **Committee on Educational Policy**

**September 14, 2023**

**In attendance: Faculty: Christopher Kingston, chair; Mekhola Gomes; Catherine Infante; David Hanneke; Geoffrey Sanborn. Provost and Dean of the Faculty: Catherine Epstein, ex officio. Students: Zane Khiry '25. Recorder: Nancy Ratner, Director of Academic Projects.**

Chris Kingston, chair of the Committee on Educational Policy (CEP), called the meeting to order at 9:30 a.m. in Porter Lounge, and the committee approved the minutes from the previous meeting. Kingston welcomed Jesse Barba to the meeting.

### **New Spring Courses**

The committee reviewed new courses for the spring and requested several changes. These included asking faculty to rewrite descriptions and to clarify the method they would use to cut the roster if their enrollment limit were exceeded. The committee also asked that the enrollment limit be raised for several courses and enforced its requirement that 200-level courses meet at least twice a week unless there was a compelling pedagogical reason for meeting only once a week.

### **Academic Calendar**

Barba said he had made two changes to the calendar, pushing the second preregistration round in the fall to the last full week of classes in the fall semester and adding two weeks to the fall semester calendar to include Orientation advising since that requires the faculty's participation. He noted that this calendar ends the fall term sufficiently early to allow somewhat less expensive travel home for students and preserves full weeks of class to the extent possible. He reassured the committee that the three-year calendar does not conflict with UMass Commencement.

Kiara Vigil, dean of new students, arrived at 10:30 a.m., and Kingston explained that the committee was interested in moving Orientation advising so the advising could take place in person. Vigil explained that it had formerly been in person, but the delay until Orientation caused anxiety and stress for students. She noted that peer institutions are now scheduling advising over the summer, some quite early. To reduce anxiety for Amherst students, she thought it was best for faculty to advise students about their course selection before they arrive on campus and, of course, before registering for classes. To accommodate this earlier advising, she provides training for new faculty over Zoom and also posts recorded and archived training sessions for faculty who cannot attend the Zoom session. She noted that training could occur at a different time, even as early as May, if that would help. She maintained that it is important for students to be able to register for their courses before Orientation, and this requires that advising occur earlier over Zoom. One advantage to moving advising and registration earlier is that it would allow the College to streamline the Orientation experience, shortening it and holding it closer to the start of classes.

Barba added that students who are under-registered at the beginning of the semester end up disproportionately in academic trouble. This year 95-98% of the first-year students were registered on the first day of the semester. He agreed that students have a lot of anxiety over registration, and the advantage to this approach is that it allows faculty advisors to schedule other discussions with new students at their leisure, rather than during a series of rushed meetings.

Hanneke said he generally liked the Zoom advising for students with the means to acquire quality devices and internet connections, but students with bad internet connections are at a disadvantage, particularly international students who may not have the bandwidth to participate in Zoom, so he worried about the equity of this approach. Vigil noted that international students arrive early, so they have support from CISE (Center for International Student Engagement) when they are going online to register for their classes.

Hanneke then turned to the calendar and said he wants it to include all required events for faculty. He sees the College moving into a 40-week calendar, which he characterized as work without pay. The provost noted that lots of calendar issues are challenging and pointed out that faculty are exempt employees who are expected to fulfill duties that are part of a faculty member's job and are not paid by the hour.

Vigil said archived videos are posted on the Academic Advising Hub webpage, so that faculty with more training can refer to these if they want more training. Other faculty may opt to join the training via Zoom when offered. She will also supplement training in other ways, including by adding tips for advisors to the purple advising folder. Sanborn pointed out that face-to-face teaching defines Amherst. Learning from other people in the same room is qualitatively superior to learning on Zoom. The same is true of advising, particularly first-year advising; the point is not just to repeat what new students have heard in training about breadth and variety, but to build intellectually meaningful relationships. But he also acknowledged that this may not be possible prior to first-year registration. He wondered whether faculty advisors should be required to schedule an in-person meeting with their first-year advisees in the second week of classes to supplement the online Zoom conversation about classes.

Infante asked whether there had been any assessment of Zoom advising. Vigil said there had been no assessment and mentioned that she had recommended that advisors schedule an in-person meeting during the first two weeks. Kingston suggested Barba add advising to the calendar and then share it with Angie Tissi-Gassoway. The committee will vote on it at the beginning of the next meeting.

### **Other**

Before adjourning Kingston mentioned that the Committee on Student Learning (CSL) is planning to take up advising and course scheduling this year, unless the CEP would prefer to take up these subjects themselves. The committee expressed interest in hearing proposals from the CSL on both topics.

The meeting adjourned at 10:50 a.m.