

**Committee on Educational Policy**  
**September 21, 2023**

**In attendance: Faculty: Christopher Kingston, chair; Mekhola Gomes; 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.

**Role of Registrar**

Kingston informed the committee that the Registrar's Office has asked whether it might have regular representation on the CEP. The CEP has proposed policies at times that have had repercussions that the committee could have anticipated if someone from that office had been present at the meetings. While the committee has found Jesse Barba to be helpful in explaining policy ramifications and in providing data on a range of issues, the committee noted that Barba might not feel it necessary to participate in its FTE discussions, which consume a lot of time in the spring term. Kingston proposed that the committee issue a standing invitation to the director of institutional research and registrar services, or his designee, to attend committee meetings and access committee materials. The committee supported this idea and asked that Barba receive the agenda prior to each meeting so he could determine whether he wished to participate in the meeting and that he be given access to committee materials.

**Academic Calendar**

Kingston welcomed Barba to the meeting and to the committee. Kingston then asked the committee to return briefly to the proposed three-year academic calendar. Hanneke again said he would like required faculty activities (e.g. first-year Orientation advising) to appear on the academic calendar. Barba said Orientation has not traditionally appeared on the calendar and mentioned that the Office of Student Affairs (OSA) is not ready to set dates for next year's Orientation. Since setting those dates could take a while, he argued against delaying a vote on the calendar until the dates are set.

While not wanting to delay the calendar vote, Sanborn said he agreed with Hanneke that it was important to create an expectation that faculty will meet in person with their advisees, and to do so, the faculty needs to know when this will occur. Provost Epstein suggested uncoupling the discussion about Orientation advising from the approval of the calendar. Hanneke hesitated. Faculty need earlier information about when they will be expected to advise their students so they can make plans for the summer, so he thought this information should be included on the calendar. As a possible compromise, he asked whether the committee thought Orientation advising dates should be voted by the faculty as a collective or whether that conversation could perhaps remain within the province of the CEP. Sanborn favored the committee exercising its authority in this case and, for now, assuming that pre-registration advising would occur the week before Orientation and that OSA will seek the advice and consent of the CEP about the exact dates before the end of classes.

For planning purposes, Barba explained that the registrar sets a two-week window prior to registration for advising week and allows faculty advisors to decide when they will advise students within that two-week period. Faculty members schedule their own advising sessions. Registration itself does not require a faculty presence. In general, Orientation advising occurs two weeks prior to the move-in date for new students.

Kingston said that for him the bigger concern is the registration process itself; first-year students with late registration appointments are at a significant disadvantage in getting into their preferred courses. He then asked whether the committee wanted to leave references to Orientation off the calendar. Sanborn suggested the committee agree that the advising week will occur prior to Orientation and that the committee will be apprised of Orientation dates when they are set. Hanneke agreed that the committee could leave the Orientation events off the calendar and approve it with the understanding that the CEP has received a commitment that faculty will be notified about the dates for Orientation advising as soon as possible.

Barba explained that OSA has hired a new person who will oversee Orientation, and changes that individual has proposed to Orientation will affect the dates. He said he would prefer not delaying approval of the calendar while waiting for those dates. Hanneke said dates change for good reasons but he wants there to be flexibility about those dates. Barba said that while advising could start as early as mid-July, he generally delays making first-year seminar (FYS) assignments until late July in case a seminar is canceled at the last minute; these changes tend to set off a chain of repercussions for students' FYS assignments. Departments making math and chemistry placements are also facing a more arduous process now that SATs are no longer required, and those departments may need a little extra time. He speculated that advising would be able to begin on August 1 at the earliest.

The provost suggested sending the calendar to the Faculty Executive Committee (FEC) with a note that the CEP expects advising will occur in August and that faculty will know those dates in advance because the committee has asked for a commitment from OSA that the CEP will be apprised of the dates before the end of the school year. The committee then approved the calendar with this understanding and without Orientation dates. Kingston said he will write to the FEC, and Barba said he will let OSA know that the committee expects to be consulted about dates for advising week for new students before the end of classes.

#### **FTE Letter**

Kingston next asked the committee to look at a draft of the FTE letter that the committee normally sends to department chairs. He noted that he had consulted with college counsel to make sure that the letter contained no language that would make the College vulnerable to possible repercussions from the Supreme Court decision on admission. Lisa Rutherford, general counsel and senior advisor to the president, reviewed the document and recommended two minor wording changes when discussing target-of-opportunity hires. The committee reviewed her concerns and suggested a few modifications to the wording of the letter.

Hanneke said he would like the data that departments include in their FTE requests to be presented in a consistent format because this would facilitate comparisons across departments. Barba noted that he usually provides data across all departments to assist the CEP with its FTE considerations and could, for example, include more information about how departments balance their offerings across the four levels. He invited the CEP to request a discrete set of data that the committee would find useful. Hanneke observed that while numbers would not necessarily influence an FTE decision, he would find a common data set very helpful in parsing arguments that departments make about their needs. He said he was inclined to have the committee request comparative data from institutional research rather than specifying in the letter the kinds of data the CEP wants. The committee asked Nancy to check with college counsel about the final wording and said it would discuss with Barba the comparative data across departments that it would find most useful before reviewing FTE requests. The committee then approved the letter, as drafted.

### **Return Policy**

Kingston next shared with the committee a proposal from OSA to make a fairly large change to the Catalog language on readmissions, including renaming the section on “Readmission,” calling it the “Return” policy, which would more accurately reflect current practice, and pointing students to a webpage where deadlines and procedures could be found, rather than specifying these in the catalog itself. Barba said OSA would prefer to restrict catalog language to general principles and point students to a webpage where more detail on practices can be found. He noted that policies have shifted substantially since this language was last updated. Since deadlines and return steps frequently get tweaked, he suggested it would make the most sense to refer students to the “Leave and Return” web page for the final word on deadlines and requirements. If the CEP believes this is too general for the Catalog, he suggested the committee suggest more specific language. The advantage to this approach is his office would not have to remember to update multiple college web pages, documents, and publications every time OSA changes its process.

Hanneke said he liked the wording change to “return” and suggested linking the policy in the Catalog directly to the webpage. He asked what surrounds this in the Catalog? Policy? Procedure? What must students demonstrate to be able to return? Barba said the policy falls under “academic dismissal” and primarily affects administrative leave and academic leave. Class deans used to interview students before they were allowed to return but class deans do not always have discretion about these decisions and do not want to conduct interviews that are meaningless. Those are the sort of changes to procedures that moving the procedures to the webpage would facilitate. Each procedural change would no longer require a vote by the faculty.

Hanneke asked who had authority in such cases. What needs to be demonstrated? Sanborn thought Hanneke’s question was pertinent. The person with authority for making those judgments should be named. Students should know who is making the decisions. He also agreed that the Catalog policy should point to the webpage which covers the process and to the documents that are required for a student to be successful. Barba added that medical leave is more complicated. OSA is trying to define practices more clearly to be compliant with ADA regulations while looking for more discretion. The policy should specify who has the authority to make the decisions, but OSA also wants the ability to change its practices to fit within legal requirements. He said he would ask OSA for revisions and then bring the request back to the CEP.

### **ROTC Course**

Kingston next turned to a request from President Elliott that the CEP consider whether a student taking a Military Science course at UMass should receive credit for the course. Kingston noted that the content of the course does not fall under the classic understanding of the liberal arts, and the registrar draws lines about such courses on a regular basis. He noted that for many years, the College has not given academic credit for ROTC courses. The College has a long historical relationship with ROTC, including a period in the 1990s-2000s when the College did not participate because not all students were allowed to participate in the ROTC program. That policy has now changed.

The provost noted that science faculty frequently express interest in UMass engineering courses at UMass receiving academic credit. She thought there might be broader principles involved in this request. Barba added a further complication: UMass has been adding vocational descriptors to course descriptions that make the courses appear less acceptable as liberal arts but more relevant to

employers. This affects, for example, journalism courses and filmography courses (that overlap with Amherst's film program).

Sanborn noted there has been a cultural shift that is affecting how one views vocational programs. He asked whether the College should recalibrate how it views these courses, thinking about some topics as applied studies rather than vocational. Barba said more students want to augment their education with UMass vocational courses so potential employers will see the utility of the courses. He said the committee could consider relaxing its requirements about courses in the consortium and perhaps allow students to take one or two or three consortium courses, even if they are not in the liberal arts.

Kingston noted that students can now participate in the Dartmouth engineering program and asked, why not allow UMass engineering or business courses if they fit with a student's academic interests? Hanneke said he would like students to be able to take the UMass course on semiconductor devices. Engineering can involve design, human interface, and diverse perspectives on how devices are used. He would like a system that removes this authority from the registrar and entrusts faculty advisors who have the expertise to determine whether the student should receive credit for a course in their field. Barba said the registrar currently consults with faculty members, asking them to review whether consortium courses should be credit-bearing for Amherst students, and the office also involves the associate provost in these decisions at times.

Barba added that some ROTC courses are half-courses, based on three-credits for full courses, so the College has no way to include these 1.5-credit courses in its credits. Kingston said Amherst could count such courses as half-courses. Barba noted that UMass differentiates between courses that are five credit hours and those that are three credit hours. At the moment, Amherst credits them all as if they were four credit hours. Kingston suggested the committee continue the conversation next week.

The meeting adjourned at 10:50 a.m.