

## **Committee on Educational Policy**

**September 7, 2023**

**In attendance: Faculty: Christopher Kingston, chair; Mekhola Gomes; Catherine Infante; David Hanneke; Geoffrey Sanborn. 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 welcomed the new and returning committee members to a new year. He welcomed Jesse Barba to the meeting and then reviewed possible agenda items for the year, including revising the catalog policies on half courses and readmission; grade inflation and its effect on determining distinction, Phi Beta Kappa, and the Woods Travis Prize; revising the first-year registration process; rethinking the comprehensive exam policy; adding someone from the registrar's office to the committee; approving a three-year academic calendar; a proposal from the Committee on Academic Standing to discontinue the little-used independent scholar program; and discussing a request to approve courses traditionally viewed as being outside the liberal arts, such as ROTC courses. Committee members suggested additional items, including whether the deadline for new courses could be set later in the year, not at the beginning of the semester; adding required faculty events including orientation advising to the academic calendar; revising the course schedule to create more 80-minute slots on MWF mornings; reviewing the uneven use of course time slots and ways to use them more effectively; discussing ways to improve advising practices; and monitoring the effectiveness of the new honors policy. The committee also noted that Workday might inadvertently be enabling access to information about students' grades. Barba said he would look into this problem.

### **Academic Calendar**

Kingston then asked the committee to review the proposed three-year calendar. Hanneke said orientation advising should be included in the calendar since faculty are required to participate. He asked whether the decision not to award actual diplomas at Commencement would continue and whether this affected the timing of the end of the spring semester. Barba explained that the desire to award honors as part of the ceremony requires sufficient time to calculate those honors. The risk of errors in calculating honors increases if grades arrive late, so the timing of the end of semester is predicated on the time his office needs to make those calculations. He noted that the reading period could be broken up by scheduling exams in between two short reading periods. The committee found that idea attractive.

Barba also explained that providing a print version of the catalog requires earlier resolution of new course proposals. He mentioned the possibility of keeping pre-registration open between the end of the second round of pre-registration until the end of add/drop. Hanneke suggested some changes to the cadence of the semester, such as scheduling advising week later. As a department chair, he has found the overlap with the beginning of the semester to be burdensome. Kingston thought it would not be in the students' best interest to schedule it later, as the pressure of workload tends to increase as the semester progresses.

In response to questions about the proposal to begin the fall 2026 semester before Labor Day, Barba explained that the first day is determined by when Labor Day falls--whether early in the month or late. If late, the College generally begins the semester prior to Labor Day. Hanneke asked about starting the

spring term earlier in 2026-27 to move Commencement earlier. Barba said he would need to check when UMass has scheduled its graduation. He could change advising and other internal events but needs to coordinate some dates with the other schools in the consortium. Hanneke said he wants to keep the calendar at 39 weeks and spoke against scheduling mandatory events outside that period.

Sanborn spoke against this year's practice of holding advising conversations with first-year students over Zoom, and Infante agreed with him. They agreed that the first conversations with an advisor should occur in person. The committee thought it would be good to discuss this with the provost and perhaps with the first-year dean.

The meeting adjourned at 10:50 a.m.