

Committee on Educational Policy

November 2, 2023

In attendance: Faculty: Christopher Kingston, chair; Mekhola Gomes; David Hanneke. Director of Institutional Research and Registrar Services: Jesse Barba, ex officio. 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.

Honors distribution requirements and cross-listed courses

Kingston said the registrar has asked that the CEP reopen the question of how to handle cross-listed sections for the honors eligibility breadth requirement for the class of 2024. The honors policy specifically designated the registrar to count cross-listed subjects towards the distribution requirement based on how the course is listed on the student's transcript. This rule was designed to reduce the burden on the Registrar's Office which would otherwise have to check transcripts manually. When the policy was approved, the committee made an exception for the class of 2023, allowing that cohort to count cross-listed courses completed during any semester at Amherst towards the distribution requirement in either area in which the course was listed. This was not extended to members of later classes (2024E and beyond), because the committee thought those students would have more semesters to choose courses to fulfill the breadth requirement. Several seniors have written to the registrar already seeking exceptions, and the registrar has asked for a definitive answer before registration ends as to whether the exception would be extended to the class of 2024. This issue has some urgency given that seniors are making their course choices for spring, which will be their last chance to satisfy the requirement if necessary.

The committee discussed whether to extend this exception for another year and decided against doing so. Hanneke expressed some concern that seniors might be unaware of the distribution requirement in the new honors policy. Barba said the Registrar will send a message to students to remind them of this aspect of the policy before they finalize their spring course registration.

"Serving the greater good" initiative

Kingston pointed the committee next to a proposal from President Elliott. The president intends to write to the faculty to invite their participation in an initiative that would encourage courses that focus on "serving the greater good." His initiative, which would welcome proposals from small groups of colleagues from the same discipline or across fields, involves course development and some funding and will encourage the faculty to think capaciously and collaboratively. The deadline for proposals would be January 15, 2024.

Kingston asked whether the committee would like to offer its support to this initiative, noting that Geoff Sanborn, who was unable to attend the meeting, had expressed enthusiasm for the proposal via email. Hanneke said he was enthusiastic about this proposal and wondered if perhaps some part of the compensation should go to the department to hire visitor lines. Gomes too expressed enthusiasm, particularly about the faculty creating more courses that encourage students to think democratically.

Grade inflation and criteria for awards

Kingston noted that he had drafted some possible new criteria for eligibility for Phi Beta Kappa and suggested the CEP discuss his draft at its next meeting. He will also reach out to the faculty members who manage the Phi Beta Kappa awards to hear their thoughts about broadening the criteria.

First-year fall course registration

Barba said Becky Catarelli, the registrar, has considered the changes to fall registration for first-year students and believes she could implement a three-phased registration process, but she recommended that the first round occur as early in the summer as possible, followed by a final round of registration during Orientation. For this to work, faculty would have to relinquish control over high-interest courses and allow the registrar to select students randomly for those slots. Alternatively, there could be an early lottery for the few high-demand courses, or high-demand sections, of a few courses. Catarelli thought departments could designate high-demand courses that they want to be treated differently. She did not recommend asking faculty to trim their own rosters because of the limited time period. Barba said Catarelli also wanted to discuss this change with those in charge of Orientation and with Dean Vigil before bringing forward a concrete proposal. The committee supported this approach.

The meeting adjourned at 10:35 a.m.