

Committee on Educational Policy

November 30, 2023

In attendance: Faculty: Christopher Kingston, chair; Mekhola Gomes; David Hanneke; Catherine Infante; Geoffrey Sanborn. Provost and Dean of the Faculty: Catherine Epstein, ex officio. Students: Zane Khiry '25; Ankit Sayed '24. Director of Institutional Research and Registrar Services: Jesse Barba. 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.

FEC teaching expectations policy

Kingston asked the committee to review a revised paragraph on teaching expectations from the Faculty Executive Committee (FEC). The CEP recommended removing the phrase “one-time,” noting that separating emergencies from planned absences might suggest that there was no need to try to make up absences due to emergencies. The phrase also struck some as redundant given the nature of emergencies. Some also thought this would protect faculty who encountered a cascading series of unfortunate events, as imagined in a letter to the CEP and the FEC from Professor Fong. The committee was less sympathetic to a suggestion from Fong that faculty should be able to determine the mode of their teaching, with the ability to teach remotely for close to half of their classes. Barba pointed out that NECHE (Amherst’s accrediting body) would require Amherst to receive additional accreditation from a national accreditor if it allowed coursework that was offered substantially online.

In addition, the committee felt that the clause “without making alternative arrangements for student engagement,” when discussing a decision to cancel more than the equivalent of one week of in-person meetings, seemed to suggest blanket permission for faculty to cancel a week of class. The committee struck that clause.

Finally, although the committee enthusiastically endorsed the idea of additional compensation, members thought this should be policy rather than handbook language, as faculty should not be asked to vote on their own compensation. The committee recommended the following revisions to the policy:

Expectations for Holding Scheduled Classes

Faculty are expected to hold all scheduled classes, ~~barring one-time emergencies~~. If a faculty member is unable to teach class in person due to **an emergency** or a short-term planned absence, the individual must make alternative arrangements for students to engage with the course, such as rescheduling the class, teaching remotely, communicating materials asynchronously, or arranging for a colleague to teach in their place. Such alternative arrangements may not exceed the equivalent of two weeks of classes. If a faculty member cancels more than the equivalent of one week of in-person class meetings ~~without making alternative arrangements for student engagement~~, the individual should **must** inform the department chair and the provost and dean of the faculty. All courses must be taught for an equivalent of **at least** eleven weeks in person; in the event that a faculty member cannot meet this requirement, the individual should inform the department chair and the provost and dean of the faculty to arrange for another faculty member(s) to take over the teaching of the

colleague's course. ~~The faculty member who takes over a course in such circumstances may be eligible for additional compensation.~~

Letter soliciting courses for 2024-25

Returning to the letter soliciting courses for the next academic year, Kingston asked if committee members wanted to make additional revisions. The committee had no further revisions and approved the letter.

Five College Exchange policy

Kingston asked the committee to turn next to the Five College Exchange policy. The FEC was concerned that the policy suggested by the CEP—in which advisors would decide whether a Five College course would count towards an Amherst degree—might be problematic if it led to inconsistency across advisors. The FEC preferred to have the registrar continue to make these decisions. Some CEP members agreed that inconsistency could be a concern and that the registrar should continue to rule on most Five College courses, with consultation with departments if uncertain how to proceed.

Given the burdens this creates for the registrar's office and the tight timeline the registrar faces in making these determinations, committee members then considered a different model, in which the registrar would continue to approve courses as it does now, but in questionable cases, students could petition the CEP for permission. The CEP is already responsible for approving Amherst courses, so the committee thought there was a logic to the CEP being the body responsible, rather than an associate provost (the process used now). Students would need to submit a petition before the end of the second round of pre-registration, and the CEP would rule on the petition prior to the beginning of add/drop. This would change the process but not the policy.

Some thought the registrar would need to maintain a list of courses that have been approved in recent years so students would know when a petition would be required. Barba said UMass generates a huge volume of new courses each year. Maintaining such a list would constitute a considerable burden for his office. He noted that Amherst now allows technical computer science courses and some engineering courses, as well as two courses in finance. Instead of maintaining a list of all pre-approved courses, he suggested the petition be limited to the areas that are most problematic because of their vocational nature: courses in business, engineering, journalism, marketing, and permaculture.

Hanneke suggested sending the proposal back to the FEC recommending this change in process and maintaining the lower cap on the number of Five College courses that would count towards an Amherst degree, with the motivational language that was in the original proposal. Infante asked whether the department would still decide whether to award credit towards the major. The committee agreed that it should, just as it does for study away. Kingston said he would draft a revised proposal, with a new petition process for courses that straddle the line between the liberal arts and more vocational subjects.

Other business

The committee briefly reviewed some of the parameters around reviewing FTEs and considered a question from Barba about introducing "tracks" within a major to a student's transcript. Noting that majors are approved by the faculty, some members were concerned that recording "tracks" on students' transcripts might lead to a proliferation of informal self-credentialing outside the established curriculum.

The meeting adjourned at 10:35 a.m.