Committee on Educational Policy

February 7, 2024

In attendance: Faculty: Christopher Kingston, chair; Mekhola Gomes; David Hanneke; Catherine Infante. **Provost and Dean of the Faculty: Catherine Epstein, ex officio. Students: Zane Khiry '25. 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 2:15 p.m. in Porter Lounge. The committee approved the minutes from the previous meeting and welcomed Professor Hall, chair of the Ad Hoc Committee on Student Learning (CSL) to the meeting.

Block Calendar Proposal

Hall and Barba shared a proposal from the Committee on Student Learning (CSL) for a new class schedule that would increase the 80-minute class options, increase the portion of the day that could be used for classes, and schedule classes so they begin regularly on the hour or half hour. The CSL also hopes to encourage a new norm for departments as they structure their class schedules: the shortage of classrooms increasingly requires faculty to think outside their own departments when drafting their schedule. Ideally, departments would use more of the available blocks, and individual faculty would agree to specify several blocks during which they would be willing to teach. Barba noted that those who are unwilling to consider times outside the most heavily congested blocks will at times find their classes assigned to less desirable teaching spaces, due to the shortage of classrooms during the middle of the day.

Asked whether students would take classes that were scheduled early or late in the day, Khiry thought most students would avoid those, if possible. While this schedule does not reduce the number of 50-minute slots, it does move some of those to the earlier and later parts of the day. Kingston said the Math department might object to this change.

Barba also noted another option, not represented on this schedule, but possible with a slight change: this would involve reducing 80-minute classes to 75 minutes to increase the time for moving between classes. Infante said she was interested in that aspect of the proposal, especially for those traveling between the Lyceum and the Science Center. Hall noted that there are also accessibility reasons for extending the time, and that students with accommodations would appreciate the extra minutes.

Kingston said he appreciated the additional 80-minute class slots. Hanneke, who spoke in favor of scheduling classes on the hour or half hour, suggested experimenting with a heat map that ignores faculty autonomy and deliberately spreads all courses across the full schedule as a way to see what might be possible. Barba said it might become necessary to establish rules about how departments use the schedule and agreed it would be useful to test what would happen if faculty gave up their autonomy over the schedule. Hanneke pointed out that Chemistry has introduced more 80-minute classes (some meeting three times a week). He thought this schedule would appeal to that department. Kingston said he thought there needs to be more conversation between departments about when classes are scheduled. Gomes agreed and pointed out that many faculty are unaware of other departments' schedules and ways that those schedules will impinge on their own enrollments.

Epstein said classes cannot all be scheduled at the same time. Students need to be able to schedule multiple courses and there are not enough classrooms to accommodate everyone who wants to teach in the most congested time slots. She also noted that the College does not plan to build new classrooms but is upgrading current spaces. Barba said the schedule could reserve certain blocks for the introductory STEM classes—in particular, those in the pre-med sequence—and educate others about how to avoid competing with these courses.

Hall said the College needs a new way to approach scheduling classes, a process which has not changed since he was a student. While he agreed with Kingston that the Math department might dislike the de-densification of the schedule, he thought there could be conversations about how to accommodate the department's needs. Kingston pointed out that the schedule could start at 9:00 a.m. instead of 8:30 a.m. and add a few more 50-minute blocks, if necessary, to balance departmental needs. Extending the day might have the perverse outcome of shortening the day if students avoid courses at the extremes. Starting slightly later would sacrifice some symmetry but might increase the more desirable options. He thanked Hall who then departed.

Double Major Rules

Barba explained that it is becoming clear that the College needs rules governing when courses can fulfill requirements across multiple majors. Under current policy, students can count courses towards more than one major, but only with explicit departmental approval. In practice, no one monitors this. With Workday, departments are now encoding the requirements for their major, and this will allow them to track students' progress towards completing that major. As currently configured, Workday will automatically apply courses to the student's "primary" major. (Workday designates a student's first-declared major as "primary.") A "secondary" major then has to do a hand-override to allow double dipping if it wants to allow the student to count that course towards the major. Barba noted Workday could be configured to allow all double-dipping instead. This is a global setting.

Kingston noted the inconsistencies in the current system, in which some departments permit double dipping and others structure their requirements to avoid the appearance of double dipping. For example, his department currently does not allow any math courses to be applied to its major, though it does require calculus as a prerequisite for some classes, but the Math department allows some economics courses to satisfy the requirements for its major. Barba said there is no real regulation at the moment. Departments do not compare notes. The path of least resistance would be to allow all courses to count to any major but this would inevitably lead to more double and triple majors, given the overlap between major requirements. Hanneke said his department requires calculus as a way to be explicit about requirements, but this requires the ADC to go through each student's transcript to approve the course if the student has already applied it to their math major. Workday would make it easier to see students who are double dipping with other courses, and the department could have a default that would allow certain courses to pass through, but this would be potentially inequitable.

Hanneke said he thought the rules should not lead to inequitable outcomes from department to department. This is a policy question: should the College enforce its rules (that is, allow a double dip but only if there is express permission from the department)? This is complicated by departments that hide requirements by making them course prerequisites rather than requirements for the major.

Epstein asked what students would lose if double dipping were not allowed. Hanneke said he thought departments will want to allow double dipping because it increases the number of their majors. Barba

agreed. Some majors have so much overlap with other majors—in part because of cross listed courses—that nearly all its majors will have another major. He pointed, as an example, to the overlap between the requirements for Education Studies and those for American Studies, Sociology, Political Science, and Psychology. There are similar overlaps across STEM fields. He said prohibition would be most consistent with current policy but the least consistent with current practice. Departments would have to enforce their policies if double dipping were prohibited.

Khiry said he thought students who declare triple majors are cheating themselves by chasing after credentials and not digging deeply into other subjects. Kingston said he favored enforcing the current policy. Barba pointed out that this would allow departments to track students' progress towards the major, catching problems before it's too late. But departments could also opt out of tracking. Hanneke agreed, saying he liked the idea that the department could easily check if students were double dipping. Barba said he thought ADCs would like this once they have set up the major in Workday.

Kingston, summarizing the discussion, said the consensus is to enforce current policy, prohibit double dipping by default, and require a department to waive its requirement if it wants the student's course to count towards more than one major.

FTE Requests

Art and History of Art

The Department of Art and History of Art has requested an FTE in photography as a replacement. The department notes that of the six faculty who have already entered, or are soon to enter, phased retirement, three are in studio art positions, including Kimball and asked that this be considered a replacement for his position. The committee discussed the request.

Psychology

The Psychology department has requested a position in developmental psychology as a replacement for Professors Aries and Raskin's remaining half-FTEs. The committee discussed the request.

Computer Science

The Department of Computer Science has requested two FTEs, one as a replacement for a professor who has chosen to leave for another academic post and will be vacating his position at the end of the semester, and one as an expansion position designed to obtain a more sustainable level of staffing. The request documented the progress made in recent years but also noted the department's desire to further reduce its average class size from 40-50 students to 30 students and to cover additional topics, such as computer vision, databases, high-performance computing, human-computer interaction, networks, programming languages, cryptography, computational biology, computer graphics, and robotics.

The meeting adjourned at 3:50.