

## **Committee on Educational Policy**

**January 31, 2024**

**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. 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 then briefly reviewed some of the issues coming to the committee this spring.

### **Faculty Teaching Policy**

Kingston reported that the Faculty Executive Committee (FEC) has revised the proposed Faculty Teaching Policy and asked the CEP to endorse this version:

In the case of an emergency, a faculty member may cancel an individual class meeting without making alternative arrangements.

If a faculty member is unable to teach class in person due to 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.

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 must 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 committee approved the revised version. Kingston will let the FEC know.

### **Five College Exchange Policy**

Kingston next turned to the FEC's revised version of the Five College Exchange Policy which it has asked the CEP to endorse:

#### **Five College Courses**

Amherst, Hampshire, Mount Holyoke and Smith Colleges and the University of Massachusetts have for some time combined their academic activities in selected areas for the purpose of extending and enriching their collective educational resources. ~~Certain specialized courses not ordinarily available at the undergraduate level are operated jointly and open to all.~~ In addition, ~~s~~Students in good standing at any of the five institutions may take a course, without cost, at any

of the other four if the course is significantly different from any offered on their own campus and they have the necessary qualifications.

~~The course must have a bearing on the educational plan arranged by the student and his or her advisor. Professional, technical and vocational courses are not generally open for Five College interchange credit. Those courses accrue credit toward degrees other than the Bachelor of Arts degree which is offered at Amherst College. Individual exceptions must be approved by both the advisor and Dean of the Faculty on the basis of the student's complete academic program at the College.~~

**BECAUSE AMHERST COLLEGE IS COMMITTED TO THE KINDS OF CRITICAL INQUIRY AND OPEN-ENDED EXPLORATION THAT ADVANCE THE IDEALS OF THE LIBERAL ARTS, IT DOES NOT ALLOW TWO TYPES OF COURSES TO COUNT TOWARD ITS BACHELOR OF ARTS DEGREE: COURSES THAT ARE DEEMED INSUFFICIENTLY RIGOROUS BY AMHERST STANDARDS AND COURSES THAT FALL INTO THE CATEGORY OF JOB TRAINING—COURSES THAT PRIMARILY CONSIST OF PREPARATIONS TO ENTER A SPECIFIC PROFESSIONAL OR VOCATIONAL FIELD.**

To enroll in a [Five-College course](#), an Amherst studentS must have the approval of his or her ~~THEIR~~ advisor **AND CONFIRMATION FROM THE REGISTRAR THAT THE COURSE IS ELIGIBLE FOR AMHERST COLLEGE CREDIT** and the Dean of the Faculty. FOR COURSES THAT THE REGISTRAR DEEMS TO FALL CLEARLY WITHIN THE DEFINITION OF THE LIBERAL ARTS, AS DEFINED ABOVE, OR THAT HAVE PREVIOUSLY BEEN APPROVED OR DENIED, THE REGISTRAR SHALL HAVE THE AUTHORITY TO APPROVE OR DENY COURSE REGISTRATIONS WITHOUT FURTHER SCRUTINY. IF THE REGISTRAR FEELS FURTHER SCRUTINY IS WARRANTED, THE REGISTRAR WILL DIRECT THE STUDENT TO PETITION THE COMMITTEE ON EDUCATIONAL POLICY, WHICH HAS THE FINAL AUTHORITY TO DETERMINE WHETHER A COURSE IS ELIGIBLE FOR CREDIT TOWARD AN AMHERST COLLEGE DEGREE. THIS PETITION SHOULD BE SUBMITTED TO THE REGISTRAR BY THE END OF THE SECOND ROUND OF PREREGISTRATION, AND SHOULD EXPLAIN HOW THE PROPOSED COURSE FITS INTO THE STUDENT'S PROGRAM OF STUDY, AND (OPTIONALLY) BE SUPPORTED BY LETTERS FROM THE STUDENT'S ADVISOR OR OTHER FACULTY, WHERE APPROPRIATE. THE REGISTRAR WILL CONVEY THESE PETITIONS TO THE COMMITTEE ON EDUCATIONAL POLICY AFTER THE END OF PREREGISTRATION, AND THE COMMITTEE WILL MAKE A DETERMINATION REGARDING ELIGIBILITY IN A TIMELY MANNER, SO THAT THE COURSE MAY BE ADDED BEFORE THE BEGINNING OF THE SUBSEQUENT SEMESTER. IF THE COMMITTEE APPROVES A PETITIONED COURSE, IT MAY DO SO FOR ALL STUDENTS, OR ON A ONE-TIME BASIS FOR A STUDENT WITH A PARTICULAR EDUCATIONAL FOCUS. The Premedical Committee reminds health pre-professional students that required courses (biology, chemistry, mathematics, physics) should normally be taken at Amherst College and not at other Five College institutions. If permission to enroll in a course is required for students of the institution at which the course is offered, students from the other Five Colleges must also obtain the instructor's permission to enroll.

**AMHERST STUDENTS MAY ENROLL IN AT MOST TWO FIVE-COLLEGE COURSES PER SEMESTER, BEGINNING WITH THEIR SECOND SEMESTER, AND AT MOST SIX DURING THEIR AMHERST COLLEGE CAREER. COURSES BEYOND THESE LIMITS MAY BE TAKEN WITH APPROVAL OF BOTH THE ADVISOR AND THE PROVOST AND DEAN OF THE FACULTY (OR THEIR DESIGNEE).** ~~Only under special circumstances will permission be granted by the advisor and the Dean of the Faculty for an Amherst student to enroll in more than two Five College courses per semester.~~

## **What's changing?**

The proposed policy clarifies the language about which Five College courses are allowed to count for Amherst College credit. It streamlines the decision-making process about individual courses in a way that we hope will remove barriers to students taking Five College courses. While allowing the registrar to rule in obvious cases, it moves the decision for borderline cases from the provost's office to the Committee on Educational Policy. It also creates a petition process for students who decide in conjunction with their advisors that a course would advance their program of study to make their case to the CEP, with sufficient time for a thoughtful decision to be made (at the moment, these requests often come to the registrar during the busy add-drop period and must be determined quickly, and often negatively, leading to the denial of some potentially valuable educational opportunities to students). In doing this, it effectively moves the deadline for submitting requests for interchange course credits to the second round of pre registration. The proposed policy also caps at six the default total number of Five College courses a student can take, while providing a path for additional courses if required.

## **Is this a big change?**

No and yes. The old language banned "professional, technical, and vocational" coursework. The new language still bans "job training," but clarifies how to decide whether a course falls in that category. The overall spirit of the policy is not changing, so in that sense it is not a big change.

That said, the old policy language was imprecise; in particular the word "technical" is broad enough to encompass many of the courses we teach right here at Amherst College. Because the approval decisions often have to be made during the crunch of drop/add, we have gotten into the practice of turning down many courses that probably should count for credit. By streamlining the approval process, this new policy will likely increase the number of Five College courses being taken. That would be a change, and it may even reverse the current downward trend in Five College enrollment. The new petition process will create some (virtual) paperwork, but should bring order and regularity to what has been an ad-hoc and rushed approval process.

## **What sort of courses have been turned down under the old policy but would survive under this one?**

Many engineering courses involve critical inquiry, design, problem solving, intellectual rigor, and collaboration among diverse individuals and groups. Although such courses should pass muster under the current policy, they are often hung up during drop/add because the Registrar's office must seek the opinions of professors on our campus or an Associate Provost. There is also a trend of adding more job-related words to course titles, which can spark confusion. We already approve many engineering courses through our Dartmouth exchange program.

A recent example is *Fundamentals of Semiconductor Devices*, E&C-ENG 344, taught in the UMass Electrical & Computer Engineering Department. In Fall 2023, two students sought to enroll in the class and were turned down by the Registrar. It was only through the intervention of a department chair that the course was approved. The course is technical, but it is about the science of semiconductors; it is not a training course to be a semiconductor fab technician. The new policy will provide a mechanism for students and their advisors/professors to make the case for such a course to be approved, based on their own expertise and the student's educational plans.

### **What's the role of the CEP in approvals?**

In the new policy, the CEP retains ultimate approval authority for any course. This is consistent with the faculty's role in approving the courses suitable for inclusion on the Amherst transcript and used toward fulfilling degree requirements. This proposal also honors the Five College agreement that specifies that the official record of any course taken through the consortium is on the student's home institution transcript. This would not require CEP approval of every individual enrollment. Instead, the CEP would provide oversight by deciding non-obvious cases, analyzing enrollment trends, and providing guidance to advisors who are unsure whether a course meets the criteria for credit.

### **Won't students just try to do a shadow major in business?**

The restriction forbidding job training remains in place. In addition, the new policy clarifies that this means "courses that primarily consist of preparations to enter a specific professional or vocational field." Some courses taught at the UMass Isenberg School of Management may meet the criteria of "critical inquiry" and "open-ended exploration" that we look for in a course, but most of them are pre-professional.

To allay any fears about students using the Five College exchange to avoid Amherst College courses, the new policy institutes a default cap of six Five College courses during a student's Amherst career. The existing policy already caps the courses at two per semester. To be clear, very few Amherst College students currently exceed six Five College courses during their time here.

### **What about students who have an educational focus that requires more Five College courses?**

With three Five College departments and programs, 15 Five College certificates, and four centers for specialized study, some of our students, such as those studying certain languages, may need to take more than six courses at other institutions. The new policy allows for this with the approval of both the student's advisor and the Provost and Dean of the Faculty.

### **Would the new policy mean my department or program has to count Five College courses for our major?**

No. Departments and programs decide which courses fulfill requirements for their majors. This policy only affects credit towards an Amherst College degree.

### **Anything else?**

The new policy adds an additional category for courses that cannot be taken for Amherst credits – those "deemed insufficiently rigorous." In practice, we have never allowed such courses. Now it will be official.

The committee made a few changes, approved this version, which will now be sent to the FEC, and Barba left the meeting.

### **FTE Requests**

*Math FTE request*

The Math department has requested two new FTEs, citing the difficulty of teaching with its current high student-to-faculty ratio. The committee discussed the request.

#### *French FTE request*

The French department has requested an open rank search to replace Professor Rockwell in the field of twentieth and twenty-first century French literature and culture, with a primary concentration in Francophone Studies (the study of literatures and cultures in French outside of France, which includes but is not limited to North Africa, West Africa, and the Caribbean). The department noted that this request has assumed some urgency, now that Professors Rockwell and de la Carrera have both entered phased retirement and Professor Sigal has announced his intention to resign his position. The committee discussed the request.

#### **New Block Schedule**

Epstein mentioned that the Committee on Student Learning has developed a block schedule that it would like to share at the next Department Chairs' meeting. The committee hopes that the CEP will look at the schedule at its next meeting (before the Chairs' meeting) and endorse bringing the proposal to a larger audience to get feedback. The committee expressed interest in reviewing the proposal at the next meeting.

The meeting adjourned at 3:30.