

Committee on Educational Policy

March 6, 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: Gent Malushaga '25; Tom Nash '26. Invited participant: 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 of February 28, 2024.

COLQ 390 H

Kingston asked the committee to consider a question from Professor Riondato about COLQ 390H "Learning by Doing: Internship and Fieldwork Reflection," a course which he has taught for the past few years. This is a half-credit course, designed for international students who have completed an internship during the preceding summer and who need to satisfy DHS/USCIS rules regarding Curricular Practical Training (CPT), a specific form of work authorization for international students. The colloquium can be taken no more than twice during a student's time at Amherst and cannot be taken until a student has declared a major. Riondato wrote that first-year international students occasionally want to take an internship or a fellowship that requires CPT work authorization during their first summer. If they do so, they cannot take an internship in both successive summers. Hanna Bliss, Director of Immigration Services, confirmed that no more than a handful of students per class would actually take the CPT course more than twice. Riondato asked that the constraints be removed.

Barba explained that COLQ 390H (taken for half credit) was not originally intended to be taken for credit towards graduation, but the change in the half course policy now allows students to count the courses towards their degree. As a result, there are now 30-35 students per semester—and not all are international students—who are registering for COLQ 390H. Epstein said the colloquium is not consistent with what Amherst traditionally considers the liberal arts and was simply designed as a way to help international students become eligible for summer internships. Unfortunately, the unintended consequences of the change in how half-credit courses are counted has attracted more students to the program.

The committee noted that the course only meets four times a semester. To maintain the original intention behind this program, members suggested it might be appropriate to award a single credit hour for this course (rather than two credit hours) - making it, in effect, a "quarter course". While warning that single credits could have repercussions elsewhere in the curriculum, Barba said he would look into the feasibility of converting the credits for this course. The committee also asked him to learn how many students take this course multiple times and how many non-international students take the course. Kingston said the committee would continue this discussion at a subsequent meeting.

Course proposals

Kingston noted that the committee continues to receive course proposals. Given that there will not be another opportunity to approve these courses in a faculty meeting before pre-registration, he proposed that faculty participate in an electronic vote on the late-arriving courses prior to pre-registration. The

committee agreed that this would be particularly helpful to faculty who had missed the deadline and to give students the opportunity to include the courses in their schedules.

Latin honors

Professor Gentzler wrote to the committee that it appears that not all departments and programs hold students to the same standard for their Latin honors recommendations. She suggested the College might need to create a rubric with college-wide standards for awarding Latin honors and shared a rubric from Princeton. The committee noted that while in the past, the numbers of *magna* and *summa* theses has been restricted by the GPA cutoffs, there is likely to be a much higher fraction of successful recommendations for *magna* and possibly for *summa* under the new Latin honors rules. While noting that there is a wide variance across departments in the fraction of honors recommendations at different levels, Kingston did not favor attempting to legislate regarding honors recommendations as a committee but thought it would be a good topic for conversation at a chairs' meeting to ensure faculty are aware of the consequences when making honors recommendations under the new system. Sanborn agreed that this would benefit from a wider discussion across departments. The committee agreed that this also relates to the bigger issue of grade inflation generally, and rather than taking this on as a committee, it should be discussed more broadly at a chairs' meeting or as a committee of the whole conversation at a future faculty meeting.

Academic Integrity

Epstein next mentioned that a faculty member at the trustees' meeting had suggested that Amherst has a culture of academic dishonesty. She was concerned by the statement and wondered how to learn whether it is true. She thought faculty might prefer to deal with infractions informally rather than reporting the academic dishonesty to the Office of Student Affairs (OAS), so it might be hard to assess how widespread the problem is. She thought there should be an automatic referral to OAS so the office could track cases of repeat offenders. Kingston questioned whether the problem was as serious as suggested and said he did not think the problem had become worse. His department—Economics—has a clear policy that students fail the course in cases of academic dishonesty and was not aware of major changes to the frequency of such cases. He added that it is important for departments to have consistent policies about grades, honors recommendations, and academic honesty infractions, partly in order to protect untenured faculty.

Barba said the academic integrity policy encourages informal resolution, and this may encourage problems with repeat offenders because OAS cannot track infractions. Epstein said she would prefer a system that would encourage more reporting to Corey Michalos, Director of Community Standards. Malushaga asked if there were disincentives to reporting infractions. Hanneke said any time there's a dispute, faculty would hesitate to make a report, but he thought it was in the College's interest to know how much and what type of dishonesty occurs, and whether there have been any trends (upward or downward). He thought a mandatory reporting system would be problematic if every report required an adjudication.

Barba said mandatory reporting would reveal patterns of behavior and cases where intervention is needed. Gomes said one problem with such reporting is the need to define what constitutes cheating and what is merely a learning moment. Students need to understand what constitutes their own work, and teaching this is part of the faculty's job as educators. Sanborn said there may also be a need to change the atmosphere. Malushaga noted that more students are using ChatGPT to do their work.

Neither he nor Nash, however, thought Amherst had a high level of cheating. Kingston agreed that AI has shifted the ground. Gomes suggested reporting could be required to let OAS know that an instructor was having a conversation about an infraction with a student, short of a formal accusation. Kingston said it might be beneficial to have a faculty handbook policy to coordinate expectations for how faculty should handle such situations. He asked if the committee wanted to invite Michalos to a future meeting, and the committee said it would.

The meeting adjourned at 3:40 p.m.