

Committee on Educational Policy

April 25, 2024

In attendance: Faculty: Christopher Kingston, chair; Mekhola Gomes; David Hanneke; Catherine Infante; Geoffrey Sanborn. Provost and Dean of the Faculty Catherine Epstein. Students: Zane Khiry '25; Gent Malushaga '25; Tom Nash '26. Invited guest: 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 Converse 309. The committee approved the minutes from the previous meeting.

Courses

The committee approved two new courses and then discussed a problem that seems to have arisen as a result of the change in the honors requirements: several fall courses in the arts have experienced unexpectedly high enrollments. Having previously not had such enrollments, the courses had no cap. At this point, two departments in the arts have asked to be allowed to impose a cap now to prevent further enrollments in a course that has space constraints. In one case, the CEP noted that the current enrollment is only a few students over the desired cap. Rather than allowing the instructor to cut students who had pre-registered for the course, the committee instead suggested the instructor add "instructor permission" as a way to keep further enrollments within the space constraints during the second round of registration and add/drop. In the other case, the course involved travel to museums, and the high enrollment would make the course's travel component impossible. Given the importance of the museum visits to the course, the committee allowed a cap to be introduced in that course as an extraordinary measure, noting the infeasibility of retrospectively capping courses during preregistration in response to enrollment fluctuations as a general rule.

Kingston also mentioned another issue in which a student had been repeatedly dropped from an upper-level course required for their major. In communication with a class dean, the student suggested that policy should be changed to prevent such situations occurring. The committee thought the CEP should not intervene in this departmental matter and suggested the student's major advisor should help resolve the issue.

Consent Required (CR)

Kingston next returned to whether instructors should be allowed to require their consent before students can register for the class. A small number of faculty have used this option as a way to manage their enrollments. After reviewing the courses with CR and the rationale provided in each case for requiring consent from the instructor, the committee felt that CR would only be appropriate during the first round of pre-registration for particular, limited types of courses: for example, those with a significant travel component, or taught in prisons, or writing-intensive courses that are designed for students with significant writing needs. The committee also noted that instructors should not be able to request a student's transcript before making cuts to a roster. Kingston said he felt that there has been some confusion about the meaning and appropriate use of instructor consent, and would remind faculty of this policy at the upcoming faculty meeting, and will also mention that requiring CR is generally not appropriate during the first round of registration but acceptable after the first round to manage enrollment for courses that have reached the course cap.

The committee also noted that faculty can use the two-phase caps to reserve a set number of spaces for first-year students in fall courses (a lower cap during the first registration period, and a higher cap introduced before first-year students register and during the fall add/drop period). Kingston asked Ratner to write to the faculty who currently have designated their courses CR and inform them that the CR designation will be removed in cases where the rationale does not appear to meet the above requirements. If a course fills to the cap, the instructor can then add CR as a way to manage enrollment during the second round of registration and during add/drop.

Rules for multiple majors

Returning to another discussion from the previous meeting, Malushaga presented new language he had drafted that would require students to complete eight unique classes for each major. At the previous meeting the committee thought this would discourage the proliferation of majors.

Sanborn then shared data from peer institutions showing that Amherst's policy of allowing students to declare double, triple, and quadruple majors (achieved in some cases by applying credit for the same courses to multiple majors) makes it an outlier. While the new language would address this, he worried that small departments and programs might find the proposed rules about double dipping problematic. He proposed instead simply saying that students cannot declare more than two majors. Limiting students to double majors would place Amherst on a par with peer institutions.

Infante noted that students would still be able to take the classes. If the courses did not overlap, she asked why the students should not be allowed to receive credit for the additional major. Epstein said the problem in her view was that students are motivated to finish majors, and they would do so, if allowed, and this would reduce the breadth of their education. Malushaga noted that most double majors are effectively completing what would be considered a minor at other schools, since most are just taking the bare minimum for the major.

Barba then shared data on the most common combinations of majors over the last four years: 53 combined math with computer science; 45 combined math with economics; 22 students combined economics with computer science; 22 combined economics with psychology; 22 combined math with physics; and 18 combined economics with political science.

Hanneke said he preferred the idea of banning triple majors to enforcing double counting rules. This would also provide a tool for faculty advisors who could cite this policy when advising students to limit themselves to one or two majors.

Kingston noted that the catalog addresses double majors but says nothing about triple majors. Agreeing with Sanborn, he said adding "Students cannot declare more than two majors" would be a clear and straightforward way to amend the policy. The committee supported this change and asked Kingston to propose that the Faculty Executive Committee (FEC) consider bringing forward a motion to revise the policy as follows:

The Major Requirement

A major normally consists of at least eight courses pursued under the direction of a department or special group. A major may begin in either the first or second year and must be declared by the end of the second year. Students may change their majors at any time, provided

that they will be able to complete the new program before graduation. **Students cannot declare more than two majors.**

Departmental Majors

Students may complete the requirement of at least eight courses within one department. They must complete at least six courses within one department and the remaining two courses in related fields approved by the department.

Some Amherst students may wish to declare a major in more than one department or program. Students who elect a double major must present the signatures of both academic advisors when registering for each semester's courses and they must, of course, fulfill the graduation requirements and comprehensive examinations established by two academic programs. In addition, double majors may not credit courses approved for either major toward the other without the explicit consent of an announced departmental policy or the signature of a departmental chairperson. In their senior year, students with a double major must verify their approved courses with both academic advisors before registering for their last semester at the College.

This policy would only go into effect for the class that enters after the policy has been approved by the faculty. Kingston said he would send this to the FEC.

The meeting adjourned at 3:35 p.m.