

Committee on Educational Policy (CEP)**September 15, 2015**

In attendance: Faculty: David S. Hall, chair; Alexander George; Caroline Goutte; Klára Móricz; Sean Redding. Catherine Epstein, dean. Students: Samuel Keaser '16, Rashid (Chico) Kosber '17; Steven Ryu '16. Recorder: Nancy Ratner, Associate Dean of Admission and Researcher for Academic Projects.

David Hall, Chair of the Committee on Educational Policy (CEP), called to order the CEP meeting at 3:00 p.m. in the Physics and Astronomy Meeting Room (Merrill Science Center 222) and welcomed President Martin for a general conversation about curricular issues.

David explained that this meeting provides an opportunity to pose questions and discuss the final FTE allocations, which aligned this year with the CEP's recommendations. He also noted that the CEP had recommended that one FTE be contingent on an external review, and that review is now underway. He then asked the president whether the CEP should be aware of any particular issues. Bidy said she saw no particular areas of concern and asked if there were areas of CEP concern. David said there were not. He added that, as he saw it, the CEP has traditionally been a reactive committee, responding to issues as they arrive, and has not been proactive in seeking out FTE requests; the committee invites requests and evaluates those that are submitted. Bidy noted that student membership on the committee provides an opportunity for insight into areas that students find wanting.

Alex asked how the upcoming external review will be incorporated into the department's FTE search. Catherine explained that the department constructed a broad-ranging advertisement which will cover multiple areas. The external committee can use that flexibility to point the search in a particular direction if it believes that will be helpful. The department will also use the external review more broadly to think about how best to structure its program, including its use of language lecturers and language teaching assistants. She also noted that the college has changed its visa requirement for teaching assistants, and these changes have allowed the college to require teaching assistants to participate in a training program, which she believes will be very helpful.

David asked the president for her opinion on the growth of non-faculty instructor positions for teaching languages and other courses. Bidy acknowledged that the cap on FTEs, set by the board, sometimes makes it difficult to meet other curricular needs. Catherine added that it has become difficult for particular departments to meet the large enrollments. To maintain smaller classes, it has become necessary to turn to lecturers in those areas. The question is whether this is the best way to meet those needs. Who should teach introductory-level courses? Some would argue that they should be taught by especially good faculty members. Catherine said her views have evolved on this question.

Bidy said she did not want to move towards the sort of university model that depends on large numbers of non-tenure-track faculty to teach courses. While lecturers may make sense for language instruction—and the college has had a long history of teaching languages under this model—other fields might be different. She thought it was legitimate to turn to a lecturer model on a temporary basis. Doing so will give the college time to see whether enrollments will continue to be high in a particular field, such as math. Both Bidy and Catherine thought it would be preferable to cover as many courses as

possible with tenure-track faculty. Bidy said she would be willing to ask the board to change the cap to meet the need for more tenure-track faculty but first wants to examine the data on enrollments across the college over time and then frame the arguments based on the data. Ultimately, she said she would rather have tenure-track professors teaching math. Catherine added that this raises an interesting parallel question about the status of performing artists and creative writers. Bidy reiterated that before approaching the board about raising the FTE cap she would need solidly developed arguments. She believes equity is important and thinks the faculty should be populated with people devoted to their teaching and to interactions with students over time. David noted that it is always harder to diminish a program than to expand one. Bidy agreed and said she thought it would be especially hard to convince the board of the need to expand the faculty to accommodate higher enrollments if the college has not first looked into the possibility of reducing the number of faculty in areas that have lower enrollments.

David next asked the president about the curricular issues that she encounters when she meets Amherst alumni. Bidy said alumni raise two issues: the open curriculum and the lack of intellectual and political diversity among the faculty. When discussing the open curriculum, there tends to be a division, with older alums believing the curriculum they experienced to be superior and younger alums defending the open curriculum. With regard to intellectual and political diversity, the president said she senses increasing frustration among some alumni and some donors, who believe that there is too little space or tolerance for points of view that aren't liberal or left-leaning. While she explains to them that the college does not and cannot hire faculty on the basis of their political positions, the alumni often cite as a counter-argument the tendency for faculty to replicate themselves and the lack of progress in ensuring that students are exposed to a wider range of political perspectives. She tries to focus the discussions in terms of the classroom, rather than the individual's political views, emphasizing that most faculty teach a range of perspectives on their material.

In response to a question about the board's attitudes toward the curriculum and political/intellectual diversity, Bidy noted that the members of the board are better informed than most alumni but some are concerned about the frustrations of their alumni contacts. She does not sense a strong view one way or the other about the open curriculum, only an interest in having a serious review of Amherst's policies and offerings. She thought the responsible thing to do is to examine the curriculum—as faculty are doing this year—and then move on from there. She also noted that the board is excellent, even-handed and not interventionist. Cullen Murphy, the board chair, writes to the board before each meeting and afterwards to discuss perspectives and ways to resolve important issues. The board's biggest concern is its fiduciary responsibility and is concerned primarily about increases in college spending, particularly at a time when the college's financial aid policies keep it from taking in more dollars in net tuition.

David turned next to accessibility questions, and, in particular, to the minimum number of courses students are permitted to take. Catherine said this is an issue that will be discussed this year by the accessibility task force, chaired by Suzanne Coffey, the chief student affairs officer. The task force will examine software policies, among other issues, and address a number of loopholes in the student handbook. She added that the college will allow a few students to be enrolled in fewer courses than was permitted in the past, but that is a policy that is not yet recognized in all documents. Bidy added that, like Title IX issues, there are not a lot of degrees of freedom on accessibility issues. Catherine observed

that accessibility issues may ultimately have an impact on the tenure process and will eventually affect many areas of campus.

Biddy wanted to know what the CEP thought of the trigger warning policy. Catherine said she has told new faculty that they will be able to determine for themselves whether and when they might want to caution students about course material that might elicit distressing memories. There may also be discussion this year about a college-wide policy. In addition, the College Council will be reviewing the honor code and may develop a new statement on academic freedom statement as part of that discussion. If so, the statement will be reviewed by the Committee of Six, the CEP, and then approved by the faculty. Biddy favored having a statement on academic freedom and thought trigger warnings, while useful, should be used carefully so as not to curtail academic freedom. Alex thought it was useful to have a conversation about these issues with new faculty but wondered whether it should also be part of the conversation with all junior faculty members. He said untenured faculty might feel uncertain and therefore quite concerned about what their senior colleagues thought they ought to be doing. Catherine agreed and added that she and Biddy will be meeting with colleagues in SWAGs on Wednesday about some of these issues.

Steven wondered whether it would be helpful if students were involved in developing the policy. He described one approach in which the professor encouraged students with issues of special sensitivity to advise him of that fact so he could ensure that they could protect themselves while not impeding the pedagogical progress for the rest of the class. Biddy said that with the College Council moving next on this issue there should be student input on an eventual policy. Alex noted that the policy currently resides in the student honor code and said he thought a statement on academic freedom should be removed to a separate place.

Sam noted that the head of the Counseling Center spoke to the committee last year about the student work load and asked the president her opinion. Biddy said she was aware of student concerns about workload and noted that some faculty seemed to support the call for fewer assignments over breaks and holidays. She was inclined to think workload concerns should be a conversation among faculty members and found it hard to imagine an institution-wide policy. Catherine thought it might be possible for the CEP to offer strong encouragement to the faculty to respect holidays when scheduling assignments. Klara said she would first want to see how students spend their time. Many are engaged so extensively in activities outside of class that they would quickly fill the time with other activities if the faculty reduced its own expectations. She thought it a complicated issue that required a more holistic examination. Catherine clarified her comment, noting that asking for work-load reductions is different from asking for protection from assignments over breaks.

David pointed out that some perceptions about the workload may result from students allowing work to accumulate, delaying completion until the break. Biddy asked if any of the students on the committee were convinced that the work load was too onerous. Sam said he thought it was. He spends the vast amount of his time on academics but thought academics shouldn't be the only point of college. Biddy said it is a matter of finding the right balance. She thought it might be interesting to repeat an experiment done at Cornell University a number of years ago in which faculty were asked to keep logs

on how they spent their time. She wondered whether Amherst could do the same with students. That information, viewed in combination with survey results, could be revealing. Many students say they don't feel they have the time or psychological space to delve deeply into material. She noted that one of the strategic planning committees had floated the idea of expanding spring break to two weeks, using one of those weeks for students to delve deeply with a professor into a topic or problem. She was intrigued by that idea but it was not ultimately adopted.

Caroline thought a survey of student time would be quite revealing. Extracurricular activities are hugely important at Amherst. Sean said students varied considerably in time spent on various activities outside of class. Some feel very overworked; others do not. David said he liked the idea of faculty keeping time logs, too, as a way to think about what a reasonable life balance should be.

Klara said students come to class with different expectations. Steven mentioned that there are many pre-professional students and many of them have extensive outside commitments. Indeed, they think success requires significant extracurricular commitments. Biddy said Amherst has undertaken a grand experiment, with its commitment to diversify the campus. She did not think there was a strong pre-professional bent overall. Steven explained that students interested in medicine have many required courses, which when combined with a major, greatly reduce the course variety and creates a less enriched experience. Biddy said it was her impression that many of the most satisfied alumni doctors had actually majored in other fields prior to medical school. Chico pointed out that the college-funded post-baccalaureate program is generally limited to just two students, so most students must complete their pre-med courses during their four years. Caroline said students could fulfill their pre-med requirements while majoring in a non-science field; perhaps advisors could promote this idea. She also noted that the college could reduce the number of double majors if it allowed minors, and that too would help students experience a broader range of courses.

Biddy said she was surprised to learn that extracurricular activities were considered by students to be a critical preparation for the next step after graduation. The sense of overload might be experienced as extreme because students consider activities outside of academic work to be required for admission to medical school or for entry-level jobs. Chico and Steven said they both believed that extracurricular activities were essential for medical school. Sam added that for students not interested in medical school the importance of building a resume is also critical—whether for a job or for graduate school—more important than grades. Klara thought perhaps students were conditioned to think this way during high school and wondered whether it really is as necessary as students think.

Caroline turned to a different issue—the need to restrain proliferation of programs and departments while finding alternative ways to facilitate new academic directions involving new FTEs. Biddy agreed that it was important to figure out how to be inventive without increasing the number of departments. Steven mentioned the committee's thinking about FTE allocations—in particular, its plan to treat expansion FTEs and replacements as equivalent. He wondered if the president thought there might be merit to retaining a separation. Biddy said that having lines return to the dean rather than to the department allows the institution to move into new areas and said she endorses this approach. Catherine said she favored organic growth within departments rather than the addition of new

departments. She and Bidy agreed that it was important to encourage experimentation and new ideas but equally important to think carefully about where to draw the lines. Bidy said she opposed inhibiting new inventive ideas on the front end, and Catherine agreed that it was important to be imaginative with fresh ideas within the curriculum.

The committee thanked the president and she departed at 4:15 p.m.

Course proposals for the spring semester

The committee next turned to the letter to the faculty regarding new and revised course proposals for the spring semester. The committee thought it might be helpful if the registrar were to include in her fall letter to the faculty a suggestion that faculty consult with their academic department coordinators about adding keywords to their courses.

Senior faculty course evaluations

David shared with the committee the default questions for senior faculty course evaluations and the draft of messages to students and faculty about the evaluations. He said the default questions were sent to the faculty last spring and one faculty member responded with a different set of questions. David suggested the committee discuss the questions in greater detail at the next meeting. Catherine thought he could delete at least one of the reminder emails to faculty. David said he will make sure only the most essential emails are sent.

Nancy reported that there has been a request for the CEP to remind faculty that exams should not be scheduled during the reading period. There was general agreement with that policy.

The committee approved the minutes from the September 9, 2015, and the meeting adjourned at 4:32 p.m.