

Committee on Educational Policy (CEP)

September 29, 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 the committee approved the minutes of the meeting of September 22, 2015.

Updates

David reported that two agenda items might come to the committee in the near future. One concerns whether the committee believes faculty members should have access to their students' transcripts, and the other would allow the committee to weigh in on whether the college should retain the 14-week spring semester. Given its curricular implications, he thought the second issue was one that the CEP should discuss although it is currently before the College Council. Klára agreed that this is an issue that should have some CEP engagement and not just be discussed by the College Council.

Course proposals

David next turned to the issue of capped course proposals. Nancy explained that proposals have been submitted that would cap courses at 15 students and asked the committee to provide some clarity on how to deal with them. Caroline and Sean were both inclined to accept the 15-person cap on 400-level English courses, given the department's letter explaining the rationale for this cap. They both thought courses that clearly state a pedagogical reason—such as a capstone course for the major—would be acceptable, but such reasons should be explicitly stated in each course that requested such a cap (as opposed to allowing a departmental policy of a 15-cap on all 400-level courses).

Proposal for a second round of pre-registration

David then asked the committee to return to its proposal for a second round of pre-registration. Should the proposal, considered by the faculty last spring, be revised in any way before bringing it back to the faculty? Klára said she sensed much unhappiness with the mandate that faculty cut their rosters to the cap after the first round and the mandate that they guarantee those students a seat in the course. She wondered if the mandatory nature of the proposal could be removed. Sean thought it would be more chaotic without a mandate, since students wouldn't know how the rules were being applied. Caroline said she would be willing to allow exceptions, based on specific requests made to the committee. Klára said she understood their concerns and thought it could be helpful to emphasize in the proposal that those with objections can opt for "instructor permission," which would then give them full control over their rosters. Faculty would need to explain the rationale for requiring the instructor's consent in the course description when submitting a course. Sean supported allowing faculty to use the instructor consent option.

David wondered what sort of gaming would take place under this approach. Caroline thought courses that were close to the cap would function much more smoothly. Klára said courses managed through instructor permission would involve lots of extra work, so faculty would only select that option if they really believed it would serve the students well or provide the only way to handle the course enrollment.

At 3:15 p.m., David welcomed Kathleen Kilventon, the registrar, to the meeting. David explained that the committee has thought about the faculty's conversation at the spring faculty meeting and also heard objections from colleagues about the guaranteed seats requirement in the proposal for a second round of pre-registration. He wondered whether Kathleen thought not having the mandate would hobble the proposal. Kathleen said she saw no point to the proposal if there was no incentive for students to participate, and without the guarantee, there would be no incentive. Since faculty would only have to guarantee the seat to students who come to the first class, faculty would still have the option to cut students who failed to appear on the first day so the proposal would continue to allow movement.

Kathleen then asked the students whether they thought there would be any incentive to participate in the second round if there were no guarantee of a seat. Steven thought getting an earlier response from the instructor would still be helpful. Sam thought it would only make a difference in large introductory courses. Under the current system, he thought the general uncertainty was problematic.

Kathleen added that without the guarantee, the only difference from the current system would be that students would have an opportunity to find a replacement course before the semester begins. In the absence of a requirement to cut rosters, she thought most faculty would not do anything different, and students would have no additional information about courses that might be open.

Sean wondered if there would be any real impact if there are only 10-12 courses that cut large numbers of students. Kathleen explained that the data showing just 10-12 courses may not be fully representative because her office can only capture data on courses in which students are dropped by the registrar. Kathleen was then asked whether the petitioner lists could be used as a way to capture students' interest in taking the course. Kathleen explained that the list of petitioners may reflect interest in the course but the purpose of those lists is to allow students to access the course site and to allow the instructor to communicate with interested students, including five-college students, prior to their enrollment.

David wondered whether college admissions might provide a way to think about registration. The proposed second round would function in the same way that "early action" functions in admission. The alternative would have to be an early decision model in which students would also have to commit to the course. Students felt the early decision model would be unnecessarily complicated. Kathleen emphasized that this is being proposed as a pilot. It could be tried without the guaranteed seat as a pilot but she thought it unclear how many faculty would cut their rosters.

Alex was inclined to allow faculty with objections to the mandate to use instructor permission. He thought it unlikely that many would take advantage of that option. Kathleen asked if those without a cap would be allowed to switch to instructor permission after the first round. Sean suggested allowing

faculty three options—faculty could opt for both a cap and instructor permission; for capping enrollment only; or instructor permission only. Faculty could use instructor permission for courses which require auditions, have specific writing requirements, etc., and there could be an option that would allow others with a cap to convert to instructor permission after the first round.

Catherine expressed a strong belief that faculty should teach anyone who shows up in the classroom, as long as space permits. Asked how she would manage the roster to ensure that she had a full course, she said she thought she would be inclined initially to over-accept, assuming that some students would not remain in the course. After she had a chance to assess patterns of student behavior, she might alter her practice. David said he agreed with her philosophically. He favored introducing an incremental barrier, which would allow those who have a strong conviction about micro-managing their rosters to opt for instructor permission. They would need to state the enrollment cap, select “consent,” and provide clear justifications for both options when proposing the course to the CEP. Otherwise, faculty would be required to cut their rosters to the cap prior to the second round. The default would be to guarantee a seat to all students who come to the first class if they are on the roster after the second round. Caroline thought some faculty had good reasons for managing courses independently, and this would give them a way to do so. Catherine also thought faculty would have a better sense of their course numbers under this arrangement.

Kathleen noted that the room can sometimes serve as an unofficial cap for a course if there is no other suitable room available. Her office attempts to change the room to accommodate course registrations whenever possible. She then asked whether faculty with an enrollment cap would be allowed to cut their courses to the limit (or above) after the first round and also convert the course at that time to instructor permission. David thought the instructor permission option should be obtained from the beginning. He thought not many instructors would do this, and those who chose to do so would probably have really good reasons.

Sean reviewed the options: a course could be uncapped, without instructor permission; capped, without instructor permission; capped with instructor permission. Klára added one more option—uncapped, with instructor permission—for instructors who want to make sure that the student’s level of expertise is appropriately matched to the course. David also noted that faculty teaching courses that give preference to first-year students—and who therefore wanted to cut below the cap to save spaces for them—would have that option if they clearly stated those preferences in the course proposal. This led Klára to wonder what would happen to first-year students if the spaces were already committed to upper classes. Kathleen said instructors would have several options to ensure spaces for first-year students: they could raise the cap; they could hold spaces open, as described above; or students could go to the first class and try to get in then. Sam was confident that students would still move around during add-drop and that spaces would open up. Caroline suggested providing a list of open classes to advisors and first-year students after the second round so students could focus on courses that were available.

Kathleen asked for clarification about how instructor permission roster management would work for courses that had stated a preference for first-year students. David said those instructors could convert

their courses to instructor permission prior to advising week and could cut their rosters below the cap to save spaces while guaranteeing seats to those who remain on the roster. Kathleen suggested piloting the program for the first run during spring pre-registration for the fall semester since this will involve a smaller group of students.

Kathleen urged the committee to emphasize that this proposal is just a *pilot* and to clarify the option to convert a course to instructor permission. As for how the pilot will be assessed, Catherine thought the add-drop numbers would show a change if it works as imagined. Kathleen thought there would also be anecdotal information about whether it is helping. Caroline thought the number of drops during add-drop should be significantly fewer if the program is working. Kathleen said she collects data on what students are dropping during add-drop and has data from prior semesters but cautioned that, if courses are converted to instructor permission, there may be fewer drops that will be captured in the data.

Caroline then turned to a different subject. Is there a way to separate registration for labs from registration for a course? Moving students' lab days is quite onerous. Kathleen said faculty can ask her office to make the changes since the process is easier for her office than for the students. She will also think about whether there might be a better way to set this up.

Sam asked the registrar whether there had been any change to the rules about taking community college courses to make up a deficiency. Kathleen said, based on last year's conversations with the CEP, she is now allowing students to take community college courses to make up a deficiency if the letter from the Committee on Academic Standing (CAS) does not specify a four-year institution. Two-year colleges tend to be more accessible and less expensive. David said he was uncertain that the CEP had made that decision, and Catherine wondered whether such a change in practice would require a vote.

Kathleen explained that when she arrived students were not permitted to take community college courses to make up a deficiency in their junior or senior year. The idea behind this practice was that juniors and seniors would take more advanced courses if the courses were taken at four-year institutions. In reality, students do not always take more advanced courses at four-year colleges, and there's no requirement that the courses they take be advanced. Moreover, transfer students are allowed to count community college courses towards graduation. Kathleen added that she now enforces whatever is in the letter the student receives from the Committee on Academic Standing. She clarified that community college courses must still meet certain standards: they cannot be offered at the remedial level; they must be in the liberal arts; the student must receive a grade of C or above; and the department must approve the course if it is to be applied to the major. The committee thanked Kathleen and she departed at 4:15 p.m.

Query about a possible department name change

The committee discussed a possible name change that was under discussion by a department, and in particular whether departments should have full control over their names or whether the CEP should have a role in overseeing any name change. The committee concluded that the CEP, Committee of Six, and the faculty would need to approve a name change. The meeting adjourned at 4:30 p.m.