

**Committee on Educational Policy  
November 14, 2018**

**In attendance: Faculty: Catherine Sanderson, by phone; Lawrence Douglas; Tekla Harms; Tariq Jaffer; Edward Melillo, acting chair. Students: Brooke Harrington '22; Hunter Lampson '21; Julia Ralph '21. Catherine Epstein, Dean, *ex officio*. Recorder: Nancy Ratner, Director of Academic Projects.**

Edward Melillo, acting chair of the Committee on Educational Policy (CEP), called the meeting to order at 8:45 a.m. in the Mullins Room. The committee approved the minutes of October 31, 2018 and November 7, 2018.

**Flexible Grade Option (FGO) Motions**

Edward asked the committee if it now wished to endorse and send the Flexible Grade Option (FGO) motions to the Committee of Six. The committee enthusiastically endorsed sending these two motions forward, noting a marginal preference for motion one. In light of the many changes, the committee recommended that the motions be presented as a full replacement of previous Catalog language, rather than removing and replacing individual letters and words. If the faculty votes to replace the current pass/fail system with this, it would go into effect in the fall of 2019 if approved.

**ORIGINAL CATALOG LANGUAGE:**

**PASS/FAIL OPTION**

Amherst College students may choose, with the permission of the instructor, a pass/fail arrangement in **two** of the 32 courses required for the degree, but not in more than one course in any one **semester**. The choice of a pass/fail alternative must be submitted by the **last day of add/drop** and must have the approval of the student's advisor. No grade-point equivalent will be assigned to a "Pass," but courses taken on this basis will receive either a "P" or an "F" from the instructor, although in the regular evaluation of work done during the semester the instructor may choose to assign the usual grades for work submitted by students exercising this option.

**PROPOSED SUBSTITUTE CATALOG LANGUAGE, TWO OPTIONS**

**MOTION 1:**

Components of the proposed system: Student declares FGO during add-drop and has five days after receiving the grade to decide whether to accept it or convert to a pass. Second semester seniors cannot participate in this. Instructors are not informed as to which, if any, students are taking a course under the FGO option. Unrecorded FGO grades are kept by the Registrar until the start of the second semester of a student's senior year. This enables recovery of previously unrecorded grades via petition to a student's class dean and the registrar should this become necessary as a consequence of changing majors or changing post-graduate plans.

**CATALOG LANGUAGE:**

## **Flexible Grade Option (FGO)**

The purpose of the flexible grade option (FGO) is to encourage students to explore the breadth of Amherst's open curriculum as they seek to meet the college's stated learning goals. Amherst College students who enter as first-years may elect to take up to four of the total number of courses required for the degree under the FGO; transfer students who enter as sophomores may elect to take up to three courses required for the degree under the FGO; and transfer students who enter as juniors may elect to take up to two courses required for the degree under the FGO. Students may not take more than one such course in any one semester. Courses taken in the second semester of the senior year are not eligible for the FGO.

To elect a course as FGO, students must file the FGO form, signed by their advisor(s), with the office of the registrar by the end of the add-drop period. Instructor permission is not required on the FGO form, and instructors are not informed if students have elected the FGO option for their course.

Students will have five days after the date grades are due to either accept the grade assigned by the instructor, or in the case of passing grades ("D" or better), elect to have a pass ("P") displayed on their transcript for the course. (No grade point equivalent will be assigned to a "pass.") If the letter grade assigned by the instructor is an "F," an "F" will be recorded. If the student takes no action, the assigned grade will remain on the transcript.

Second semester seniors who have not exhausted their FGO options may select one course to be taken pass/fail. To do this, seniors submit a pass/fail form, signed by their advisor(s) and the course instructor, to the registrar by the end of the add-drop period. (No grade point equivalent will be assigned to a "pass.")

### **MOTION 2:**

Components of the proposed system: Student declares a minimum grade during add-drop. Second semester seniors can use this option. All other components of the FGO system remain unchanged.

### **CATALOG LANGUAGE:**

## **Flexible Grade Option (FGO)**

The purpose of the flexible grade option (FGO) is to encourage students to explore the breadth of Amherst's open curriculum as they seek to meet the college's stated learning goals. Amherst College students who enter as first-years may elect to take up to four of the total number of courses required for the degree under the FGO; transfer students who enter as sophomores may elect to take up to three courses required for the degree under the FGO; and transfer students who enter as juniors may elect to take up to two courses required for the degree under the FGO. Students may not take more than one such course in any one semester.

To elect a course as FGO, students must file the FGO form, signed by their advisor(s), with the office of the registrar by the end of the add-drop period and must declare to the registrar the

minimum grade they will accept when they file the form. Instructor permission is not required on the FGO form, and instructors are not informed if students have elected the FGO option or the minimum grade declared by any student exercising that option in their course.

If the grade assigned by the instructor is lower than the minimum grade, the registrar will record a pass ("P") in the case of passing grades ("D" or better) on the student's transcript. If the letter grade assigned by the instructor is an "F," an "F" will be recorded. (No grade point equivalent

### **Learning goals**

Edward asked the committee to turn next to the Ad Hoc Curriculum Committee's proposed learning goals and review revisions that CEP members suggested. The committee was in general agreement that each goal should be sufficiently specific to convey the idea, yet sufficiently capacious for all departments and programs to see their courses contributing to these goals. To that end, the committee suggested a few changes to two of the goals and asked to see a clean document at the next meeting.

### **Interdisciplinary majors**

The committee next returned to the request from Jonathan Friedman, the co-chair of the Committee on Academic Standing and Special Majors (CAS), to move the deadline for declaring an interdisciplinary major. The committee asked Jonathan how he thought the CAS might react if it received a late proposal for an interdisciplinary major from students who had been studying abroad during the first semester of their junior year. He thought the committee would be able to accommodate late submissions on a case-by-case basis, assuming that the student had previously contacted committee chairs to request an extension. This could be explained in the relevant web page. Asked whether the committee has ever felt compelled to approve a request because the student had no other path to graduation without that approval, he said this has occurred, and the committee would prefer to avoid a recurrence of such a situation. The CEP found his explanation satisfactory and endorsed moving the deadline forward. The committee approved the following revisions to the Catalog, with the change set to begin with the class of 2023, and asked that these be sent to the Committee of Six so they can be included with other revisions to this section of the Catalog:

#### **INTERDISCIPLINARY MAJORS**

Students ~~with special needs~~ who **WOULD LIKE** desire to construct an interdisciplinary major will submit a proposed program, endorsed by one or more professors from each of the departments **OR PROGRAMS** concerned, to the Committee on Academic Standing and Special Majors. Under ordinary circumstances, the proposal will be submitted during the first semester of the junior year and ~~not under any~~ **NO** circumstances later than the ~~eight~~ **SEVENTH** week of the ~~second junior~~ **FIRST** semester **OF THE JUNIOR YEAR**. The program will include a minimum of six upper-level courses and a thesis plan. ~~Upon approval of the program by~~ **THE** Committee on Academic Standing and Special Majors **WILL AUTHORIZE THE APPOINTMENT OF** an ad hoc advisory committee of three professors, **WHICH WILL APPROVE** ~~appointed by the Committee~~ will have all ~~further responsibility~~ any possible modifications in the program, administering an appropriate comprehensive examination, reviewing the thesis and making recommendations for the degree with or without Honors. Information on **PROPOSING** ~~preparation, form, and submission of proposed~~ interdisciplinary programs is available in the Office of Student Affairs.

### **Lecturer policy**

Edward next asked the committee to return to its discussion about whether the dean should consider expanding the number of lecturers. Tekla said the Amherst education is predicated on a belief that the best teaching and learning occur when professors are actively engaged in research and in creating new knowledge. Lecturers can be fine teachers and appropriate for early language learning, but substituting a lecturer in other parts of the curriculum undermines the argument for the existence of small colleges like Amherst. Lawrence agreed with Tekla that lecturers were appropriate for first-year language learners; he also thought the use of language lecturers should be factored into FTE requests.

Catherine E. explained her policy then regarding spousal hires. If a faculty spouse has received an offer from another institution and if the department is willing to give up a half FTE, and the CEP agrees, the college will create a faculty position for the individual. For other spouses, the dean has created lectureships. Tariq said this policy unfortunately circumvents a national search and would seem to undermine the search for underrepresented minorities.

Tekla said that, while she believes in having a powerful dean with the latitude to make some hiring decisions when necessary, she would prefer not to create a separate caste of lecturers. Faced with a trade-off between hiring visitors and lecturers, she would lean towards visitors, because they are not permanent, but she was also inclined towards hiring fewer visitors.

Catherine E. said she would welcome advice about whether to convert visitors to lecturers as a way to help departments cover classes in which they have serious enrollment problems. Lawrence said he also worried about creating a permanent caste of lecturers but thought relying on visitors might be even more problematic since they cannot participate adequately as advisors and are often gone by the time a student needs a recommendation. Catherine E. said she found this conversation helpful and asked that it be continued in the future.

### **Pilot pre-registration system**

Nancy mentioned that the committee will need to make a recommendation this year as to whether the pilot pre-registration system should become permanent. She asked that members let her know if they want any additional information before the committee meets to consider that question.

The meeting adjourned at 10 a.m.