

Committee on Educational Policy
October 17, 2018

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

Lawrence Douglas, acting chair of the Committee on Educational Policy (CEP), called the meeting to order at 8:45 a.m. in the Mullins Room.

Course proposals

The committee, continuing its review of new course proposals, recommended some minor revisions and raised concerns about descriptions in which complex language might create a barrier to students' participation in a course.

Special topics policy

The committee next returned to the proposed revisions to the policy on Special Topics courses. Tekla recommended some revisions, and the committee then approved the following policy:

Departments may offer a semester course known as Special Topics in which a student, or a group of students, ~~study or read widely in~~ **EXPLORES** a field of special interest **THROUGH SELECTED READING, ORIGINAL RESEARCH, OR ARTISTIC PRODUCTION**. ~~It is understood that t~~ This course **NORMALLY** will not duplicate any other course regularly offered in the curriculum, and ~~that~~ the student(S) will work in this course as independently as the **INSTRUCTOR** ~~director~~ thinks possible.

IN ORDER TO REGISTER FOR A SPECIAL TOPICS COURSE, THE STUDENT MUST HAVE FIRST ~~Before the time of registration, the student~~ **OBTAINED PERMISSION FROM THE INSTRUCTOR; TOGETHER STUDENT AND INSTRUCTOR**. ~~who arranges to take a Special Topics course should consult the instructor in that particular field, who will direct the student's work; they will decide the~~ **COURSE** title to be reported, the nature of the examination or term paper, and will **FORMULATE** ~~discuss the preparation of a bibliography and a plan of coherent study.~~ All students must obtain final approval of the Department before registration. Two Special Topics courses may not be taken ~~concurrently~~ **IN THE SAME SEMESTER** except with the prior approval of the student's Class Dean.

The committee recommended that the chair now send this proposed policy to the Committee of Six for further action.

Calendar

Lawrence asked members to turn next to a revised version of the college's three-year proposed calendar. This version, supplied by Jesse Barba, corrected the exam dates for the second and third year and would provide a three-day fall break for 2020, with classes resuming on Tuesday, October 13th. This day would follow a Monday class schedule and would allow for a two-day reading period and a full five-day exam period. The fall break for fall 2021 (year three), in this version, would include the standard four-day break, shortening the reading period to two days, with a standard five-day exam period.

Catherine E. noted that this is the calendar that should have been sent to the faculty. She urged the committee to allow the faculty to vote on the corrected version of the calendar that was originally sent.

Tekla, who had initially suggested an alternative calendar with a system of “floating” reading period and exam days, said she had previously not understood that the CEP was the only faculty committee vetting this calendar. Alone in that assumption, she said she would vote against this calendar but would not insist on the faculty being presented with her more extensive revisions.

Catherine E. said the Committee of Six would like this calendar to be returned to the faculty for a vote and will include background materials to inform the faculty of previous conversations about this calendar prior to that vote. Tekla said she still thought the lengthy reading period problematic, though not the 13-week semester, and did not want to conflate the two issues. The committee voted to forward this calendar to the Committee of Six, with five in favor, including one member who voted in absentia, and one opposed.

Pass/Fail/NRO policy

Catherine E. said she thought the right way to move forward with the Pass/Fail/NRO policy choices would be to present the faculty with a series of options. She planned to ask Jesse Barba to formulate ways for the committee to proceed. This could include votes on policies which only offered pass/fail, only offered the non-recorded option, offered both, among other options. The committee will return to this issue at its next meeting and then consider possible paths forward.

Lecturer policy

Raising a new question, Catherine E. mentioned that there has recently been a proliferation of lecturer requests. Lecturers at Amherst have often proven themselves to be great teachers even though some may have lacked the credentials for a faculty position. For departments, lecturers also offer some clear benefits: they bypass the difficulty of obtaining an additional FTE and offer the department more flexibility in course offerings. However, having lecturers creates a two-tiered faculty, and this causes concern, so she was wondering whether increasing the number of lecturers is a wise way to proceed. She said she felt strongly that introductory courses should ideally be taught by tenure-line faculty. She then asked what information would help the committee discuss this question.

The committee asked the dean to provide the number of lecturers the college has and the numbers and kinds of positions being considered. Members asked her to think about the role that lecturers play, the departments where they are located, the varying requirements of their positions, and also requested information about the reappointment process and search requirements. They were also interested in knowing the number of visitors at the college. Catherine E. noted that visitors, by AAUP rules, must be transient; the college hews closely to AAUP guidelines with its visitors.

The meeting adjourned at 9:50 a.m.