

**Committee on Educational Policy
October 24, 2018**

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

Catherine Sanderson, 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 10th and 17th.

Course proposals

The committee discussed additional course proposals, examining them for clarity of language, the size of enrollment caps, the course numbering system, and whether particular keywords were appropriately applied.

Policy on avoidance of conflict of interest

Catherine S. reported that the Committee of Six had recommended a few revisions to the wording of the conflict of interest policy that the committee had drafted to govern situations in which faculty members might be inclined to teach their own children or other close relatives in a course for credit. The Committee of Six recommended the following wording:

Avoidance of Conflict of Interest

Instructors should not teach their own children or other close relatives (such as a spouse or partner, child or grandchild, parent or grandparent, sibling, or a spouse, partner, or child of any of the foregoing) in a course for credit at Amherst College. The potential conflict of interest could have negative effects on the student who is a relative of instructor, as well as on the instructor's relation to the other students in the same course. In the rare instances in which such enrollment is unavoidable, the faculty member should discuss the situation with the chair of the department and the dean of the faculty in advance of the course. In no event should parents, guardians, or other relatives be grading their own child's or other relative's work; another faculty member should evaluate the work and decide upon the grade.

The committee approved the language and asked Nancy to inform the Committee of Six that the CEP approved the policy and was agnostic about where it should appear in the Catalog.

Policy limiting students to two majors

Catherine S. next turned to the policy limiting students to two majors. She reported that the Committee of Six had supported the spirit behind the CEP's motion but recommended some revisions to the Catalog language. She asked the CEP to approve this new version, which would take effect with the class of 2023, if approved by the faculty. The committee added two minor phrasing changes, one of which responded to a recommendation from the registrar, and approved the revised motion. The committee noted that two revisions recommended by the registrar—a phrase addressing the timing of declaration of major for transfer students who enter as juniors and the removal of the phrase “with special needs”—would need to be added as a separate motion if the motion fails.

THE MAJOR REQUIREMENT

Liberal **ARTS** education seeks to develop the student's awareness and understanding of the individual and of the world's physical and social environments. If one essential object in the design of education at Amherst is breadth of understanding, another purpose, equally important, is mastery of one or more areas of knowledge in depth. Students are required to ~~concentrate their studies—~~ to select and pursue a major in order to deepen their understanding, to gain specific knowledge of a field and its special concerns, and to master and appreciate the skills needed in that disciplined effort. **THE COLLEGE OFFERS BOTH DEPARTMENT AND PROGRAM-BASED MAJORS. IN CONSULTATION WITH THEIR ACADEMIC ADVISOR, STUDENTS HAVE THE OPTION OF DECLARING AND COMPLETING A SECOND MAJOR ~~ONE OR TWO MAJORS.~~**

A major normally consists of at least eight courses pursued under the direction of a department, ~~or special group.~~ **PROGRAM, OR INTERDISCIPLINARY MAJOR COMMITTEE.** A major may begin in either the first or second year and must be declared by the end of the second year. **A STUDENT MUST DECLARE A MAJOR BY THE END OF THE SECOND SEMESTER OF THE SOPHOMORE YEAR. TRANSFER STUDENTS WHO ENTER AS JUNIORS MUST DECLARE A MAJOR BY THE END OF THEIR FIRST SEMESTER IN RESIDENCE.** Students may change their majors at any time, provided that they will be able to complete the new program before graduation. **STUDENTS MAY ADD, DROP, OR OTHERWISE CHANGE A MAJOR AT ANY TIME PROVIDED THAT THEY CAN MEET ALL MAJOR AND GRADUATION REQUIREMENTS.**

~~—The major program can be devised in accordance with either of two plans:~~

DEPARTMENTAL/~~PROGRAM~~ MAJORS

Students may complete the requirement of at least **REQUIREMENTS OF A MAJOR BY TAKING** eight **OR MORE** courses **THAT THE DEPARTMENT OR PROGRAM HAS APPROVED.** ~~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 **SECOND** major in more than one department or program. This curricular option is available, although it entails special responsibilities. At Amherst, departments **AND PROGRAMS** are solely responsible for defining the content and structure of an acceptable program of study for majors. Students who elect a **double TO PURSUE A SECOND** 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~~ **BOTH MAJORS.** ~~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.~~ **DEPARTMENTS AND PROGRAMS WILL DETERMINE WHETHER A COURSE MAY COUNT TOWARD MORE THAN ONE MAJOR. STUDENTS MAY NOT CREDIT COURSES FOR ONE MAJOR TOWARD THE OTHER WITHOUT THE EXPLICIT CONSENT OF EACH DEPARTMENT OR PROGRAM.** 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.~~

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 eighth week of the second ~~junior~~ 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~~ 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.

A part of the major requirement in every department **AND PROGRAM** is an evaluation of the student's comprehension in his or her major field of study. This evaluation may be based on a special written examination or upon any other performance deemed appropriate by each department **AND PROGRAM**. The mode of the evaluation need not be the same for all the majors within a department **OR PROGRAM**, and, indeed, may be designed individually to test the skills each student has developed.

The evaluation should be completed by the seventh week of the second semester of the senior year. Any student whose comprehension is judged to be inadequate will have two opportunities for reevaluation: one not later than the last day of classes of the second semester of the senior year, and the other during the next college year.

Pass/Fail/Non-Recorded Option (NRO) policy

Catherine E. suggested, now that the faculty has had a conversation about the proposed Pass/Fail/NRO option, the CEP think about the appropriate path forward. She asked whether the committee had heard consensus around a particular policy and whether members thought this should be presented as a set of alternative motions, staged one after another.

The committee thought faculty were disinclined to support both the NRO and also an expanded P/F, and worried that offering both would create a confusing litany of redundant options. Members suggested instead that students be given one option, either the NRO or P/F, but not both. They further noted that the faculty, by approving a more flexible course withdrawal policy, had addressed the need for a safety valve, which seemed to be the single argument for offering both options.

If the primary goal is to move students out of their comfort zone and encourage more risk-taking in course selection, committee members pointed out that this could be accomplished with either an expanded P/F option or an NRO option, if there were more flexibility in the deadline for declaring the option. Most thought a later date would encourage more experimentation, although some wondered if a later date would simply lead to more attempts to game the system.

After further discussion, the committee began to gravitate towards a modified NRO which would combine a system that was formerly used by Bryn Mawr and the NRO system that is in current use by Vassar. Under this modified NRO, or Flexible Grading Option (FGO), students would be required to obtain their academic advisor's approval and declare the course FGO before the end of add/drop but would decide whether to retain the assigned grade or convert the grade to pass/fail only after grades are reported at the end of the semester in question.

While this would reduce stress, it would almost certainly contribute to further grade inflation, an issue which the faculty would need to address in other ways. The committee was inclined to recommend this FGO, requiring approval only by the student's academic advisor, not the instructor, though some noted that the advisor might be the instructor in some cases. The committee thought instructors might view students differently if they knew students were taking the course FGO. Students could opt for up to four FGOs over four years, with no more than one taken in a single semester. Because of the highly condensed spring semester grade reporting period for seniors, it was considered prudent not to allow seniors to use this option during the second semester of senior year. Departments could develop rules about whether courses for the major could be taken in this mode. The committee suggested this be designed as a motion for the next meeting.

The meeting adjourned at 10:00 a.m.