

**Committee on Educational Policy  
October 3, 2018**

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

Tariq Jaffer, acting as 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 September 26, 2018.

**Target-of-opportunity request**

Tariq asked the committee to turn first to a request for a target-of-opportunity (ToO) hire and suggested that members begin by referencing the target-of-opportunity procedures.

**Special topics policy**

Tariq explained next that the Committee of Six had discovered an inconsistency within the Catalog with regard to Special Topics courses. The Catalog states on page 86 that, "It is understood that this course will not duplicate any other course regularly offered in the curriculum..." and on page 249, in its discussion of the economics major, that "A student who receives a grade of D in a core theory course may not count that course towards the major and must take ECON 390 (a special topics course focusing on that area of core theory) and receive a grade of C- or better in that special topics course." The Economics department thinks this language is necessary because students are not permitted to repeat a course unless they have received a failing grade or withdrawn from the course in a previous semester. The committee agreed that this inconsistency in language needed to be addressed and thought other aspects of the language in this policy could be addressed at the same time. They recommended the following revision and agreed to discuss it again at the next meeting:

Departments may offer a semester course known as Special Topics in which a student, or a group of students, studies, researches or artistically explores a field of special interest. ~~It is understood that~~ ~~†~~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.

**Learning Goals Statement**

Tariq turned next to the report from the Curriculum Committee, which had proposed replacing the Liberal Studies Curriculum Statement with a new Learning Goals Statement:

**The Learning Goals Statement**

Amherst's liberal arts curriculum is based on a concept of education as a transformative process. The curriculum provides a structure within which students are able to discover their intellectual and creative passions and equip themselves for a life of active, collaborative learning. The college's learning goals, listed below, work in conjunction with the open curriculum. By articulating what an Amherst education should enable each student to do, they provide a basis for shared intellectual experiences and identify the principles that students should keep in mind when choosing a path through the college.

**1. Reason on the basis of various forms of evidence.**

The ability to solve complex problems depends on the ability to find, evaluate, and use many types of evidence. Some of the ways in which students can develop these abilities are by learning how to interpret quantitative data; learning how to do close readings and viewings of texts, objects, events, and performances; learning how to recognize and address the grounds of arguments; and building research skills.

**2. Communicate effectively.**

In order to communicate effectively with broad, diverse audiences, one must be able to sense both what one is trying to convey and how others can most fully grasp it. Some of the ways in which students can develop this ability are by taking courses that emphasize writing or speaking skills; taking courses that explore non-verbal means of expression; and participating in activities that require them to communicate with different types of audiences.

**3. Approach questions from multiple perspectives.**

While at Amherst, students should expose themselves to new ways of thinking and re-evaluate ingrained habits of thought. Some of the ways in which they can do this are by taking courses that bring global perspectives to bear on complex issues; taking courses that offer interdisciplinary perspectives; learning to understand the past on its own terms; learning to employ different modes of reasoning; taking courses that focus on perspectives and communities that are not their own; and studying away.

**4. Develop a sense of the common good.**

Part of the work of education is the process of expanding one's ability to take seriously the claims of others and make decisions on the basis of something more than self-interest. Some of the ways in which students can develop this ability are by taking courses that analyze the relationship between identity and power; taking courses that examine the contexts and contemporary experiences of various types of inequality; taking courses that explore the historical origins of various types of inequality; and collaborating on experience-based learning projects that lead to critical reflection on the common good.

**5. Pursue intellectual and creative interests in depth.**

Only by spending a significant amount of time studying a subject or developing skills in an area can one experience transformational breakthroughs, moments at which one is able to recognize both how far one has come and how far there is to go. The most obvious way in which students can gain this experience is by majoring in a department or program; some of the other ways are by carrying out extended research projects; doing honors work; and involving themselves in activities that draw on their intellectual and imaginative resources.

**6. Broaden intellectual and creative horizons.**

Exploring multiple fields of knowledge and modes of creativity is an essential part of the process of preparing to be a lifelong learner. Students are, accordingly, strongly encouraged to take a wide range of courses and to seek opportunities to extend their learning through co-curricular activities. In a variety of ways, but especially through conversations with their advisors, students should seek to become increasingly aware of the educational opportunities that surround them at Amherst and increasingly confident about their abilities to extend themselves into new intellectual and creative territories.

The committee members were reluctant to reject their colleagues' work—work that had been produced after a three-year process, involving significant thought, feedback from many colleagues, and research on the approaches taken by peer institutions. Members nevertheless felt they should voice their reservations and comment on a few difficulties, grammatical and substantive. The committee focused, in particular, on the fourth goal, which mentions inequality twice but ignores social justice and environmental responsibility. Others were concerned by the absence of the importance of learning foreign language, learning about the past, developing an historical sense, and undertaking the study of nonwestern cultures. One member regretted that references to “writing” appeared only once, which seemed to underplay the importance of clarity and precision in writing and critical thinking.

Another member suggested this might reflect a concerted effort to move the conversation about what an education should be, enumerating what students should be able to do when they leave the institution. This gestalt, which focuses on skills, presents a different way of thinking about learning goals, hence the absence of history, the past, etc. Others were not persuaded by this and thought that having an historical perspective was critically important. One student member said his advisor focused on the need to build skills and thought the headings in this list would serve this purpose.

This still left some members concerned that the list was inconsistent. Some goals appeared to offer high levels of resolution while others did not, leading to a disconnect at the granular level which mixed skills and habits of mind and breadth and depth. They noted the fine line between the first goal, which most thought acceptable, and the fourth, which seemed more problematic, and the sixth which was deemed insufficiently expansive. The committee decided to continue this conversation at its next meeting.

The meeting adjourned at 9:55 a.m.