

**Committee on Educational Policy
September 26, 2018**

In attendance: Faculty: Catherine Sanderson, chair; Lawrence Douglas; Tekla Harms; Edward Melillo. Students: 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 8:50 a.m. in the Mullins Room.

Meeting time and place

The committee agreed that it would meet on Wednesday mornings, 8:45-10:00 a.m., in the Mullins Room for the remainder of the semester.

Approval of minutes

The committee revised and then approved the minutes from September 5, 2018, and then turned to the minutes of September 12, 2018, which it approved with some revisions. In the course of that discussion, Tekla noted that the CEP is the only body that reviews the full curriculum and urged fellow committee members to examine the course catalog when reviewing newly proposed courses to avoid redundancies as well as curricular gaps.

The dean also expressed concern about courses which have very low enrollments—in particular, courses in the humanities, other than language courses, with five or fewer students. Others thought a conversation about low enrollment might be more appropriately held between the dean and the instructor, or perhaps the chair and the instructor. While the committee could discuss courses in which the low enrollment is an artifact either of the time at which the course is offered or the narrowness of the topic, the committee thought this might be a more appropriate conversation between the dean and the instructor. If the low enrollment results from other issues, the committee thought it inappropriate as a CEP conversation. The committee members nevertheless expressed concern about courses with low enrollment because these inevitably raise the enrollments in other courses; they encouraged the dean to examine the reasons. Catherine E. said that as a first step, she thought it would be best to ask the chair to raise the topic with the faculty member. She also noted that this is not a common occurrence and said she would bring numbers to the next meeting.

Updates

Nancy reported that IT will work on finding a way to give FYS faculty access to their students' application materials, but a technological way to share these materials will probably not be ready until next fall. Tekla asked that FYS faculty be advised that they may have access to application materials once the process has been developed. Catherine E. thought the broad availability of application materials should not occur until there has been more discussion, including discussion by the Committee of Six, in light of the vote last year to restrict access to such material. Lawrence said he would be interested in seeing the college extend the access that faculty advisors have to application materials to FYS faculty.

Nancy also reported that IT has created a new keyword for courses which have a focus on issues of social justice, as requested by the committee, but students will not see the keyword until faculty have had a chance to add it to their courses.

Policy on teaching close relatives

Catherine S. next shared a slightly revised version of the policy regarding teaching close relatives:

Avoidance of conflict of interest

Instructors should not teach their own children or other close relatives (that is, anyone with whom the faculty member has a close relationship, 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. The potential conflict of interest could have negative effects on the student himself or herself, as well as on the instructor's relation to the other students in the course. In the rare instances in which such enrollment is unavoidable, such as when the parent is teaching a course required for the student's major, the parent 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 the parent be grading his or her own child's work; another faculty member should be asked to evaluate the work and decide upon the grade.

The committee approved this version, and the chair said she would now send this to the Committee of Six.

Deadline for withdrawing from the college

Catherine S. turned the committee's attention to a question raised by the class deans and the Office of Student Affairs. They have asked for clarification on the current deadline for students to withdraw from a course and from the semester.

Under "Voluntary Leaves and Medical Leaves", the catalog specifies that students have until the seventh week of the term to withdraw from the semester:

Prior to the seventh week of any semester, students may choose to withdraw voluntarily without their final grades being recorded. However, unless granted exemptions for medical reasons or grave personal emergencies by the Committee on Academic Standing or the Office of Student Affairs, students who withdraw after the seventh week of a semester will withdraw with penalty and have final grades for that semester recorded on their permanent academic records. (College Catalog, p 74)

Later, under "Degree Requirements" the catalog specifies that students may withdraw from a course, without penalty, in any semester prior to the senior by the end of the tenth week. This policy was amended by the faculty in the spring of 2017 based on a recommendation from the Curriculum Committee.

In any semester prior to the final year, a student who experiences severe academic difficulty and has exhausted all academic resources (e.g., met with professors during office hours, received tutoring, met with class deans, etc.), may be allowed to withdraw from a course without penalty and graduate with 31 courses. This exception may be invoked only once, and requires permission of the instructor, advisor and class dean. The deadline for withdrawal requests is the end of the tenth week of the semester. (College Catalog, p 78)

While these sections are different in their content, dealing with semester and single course withdrawal respectively, they explained that the difference in the deadlines pose some practical issues for the class deans and case managers. First, the separate deadlines create some confusion as class deans work with

students and faculty. Second, and more substantively, the more extreme step of withdrawal from the semester comes before students are required to decide if they will drop a single course in order to devote their efforts to saving their other classes. Ideally, students would only withdraw from the semester after all options have been explored.

The spirit of the faculty vote, on April 4, 2017, was to allow students the time to utilize the college's support resources before deciding to drop a class. Frequently, the Committee on Academic Standing, instructors, and students did not have sufficient time to see if efforts to rescue a failing grade would be effective by the seventh week. The deans argued that the same problem exists for the decision to withdraw from the semester at the seventh week.

The class deans thought it was possible that this discrepancy in deadlines was simply a clerical artifact of how edits are made to the college catalog. The course drop language could have been modified without the knowledge of a separate deadline for semester withdraw elsewhere in the document. They asked whether the CEP and the faculty intended these deadlines to be different.

Tekla pointed to the difference between withdrawing from a course and withdrawing from the semester. She thought it was acceptable to allow students time to exhaust every means of succeeding before withdrawing from a course. It is a bigger decision to withdraw from the semester, and this decision should generally not occur so close to the end of the semester. She particularly worried students might use the semester withdrawal as a way to substitute withdrawals for poor grades on their transcripts. Lawrence noted that introducing the proposed change would introduce a lower bar for a semester withdrawal than for a course withdrawal; this, to his mind, did not make sense. Under the present system students have three options: they can withdraw without penalty before the seventh week; withdraw without penalty even *after* the seventh week if they have a serious medical issue or a grave personal emergency; or withdraw after the seventh week but with failing grades on their transcript. He thought it was proper to maintain the lower bar for withdrawing from a course than for withdrawing from a semester.

Motion to limit students to no more than two majors

The committee next turned to a motion to limit students to no more than two majors. Catherine S. explained that the CEP had recommended that the Committee of Six make this a separate motion last spring when it forwarded the motion to approve minors at the college. The Committee of Six did not include this as a separate motion at that time. The CEP now asks that the Committee of Six review the attached motion.

Motion

The Committee on Educational Policy proposes the revision (see below) to the language in the [Amherst College Catalog on pages seventy-nine and eighty](#) of the current catalog, **TO TAKE EFFECT WITH THE CLASS OF 2023.**

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. STUDENTS HAVE THE OPTION OF COMPLETING 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.** ~~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 ALL MAJOR AND GRADUATION REQUIREMENTS CAN BE MET.**

—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 within one department **OR PROGRAM OR BY COMPLETING.** ~~They must complete at least six courses within one~~ **IN THE MAJOR AND** department and the remaining two **ADDITIONAL** courses in related fields **AS** approved by the department **OR PROGRAM.**

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~~ **BOTH** academic **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.~~ **STUDENTS MAY NOT CREDIT COURSES FOR ONE MAJOR TOWARD THE OTHER WITHOUT THE EXPLICIT CONSENT OF EACH DEPARTMENT OR PROGRAM. DEPARTMENTS AND PROGRAMS WILL DETERMINE WHETHER A COURSE MAY COUNT TOWARD MORE THAN ONE MAJOR.** ~~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. 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, an ad hoc advisory committee of three professors appointed by the Committee will have all further responsibility for approving 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 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.

Policy on students' recording class lectures

Turning to a new issue, Catherine S. asked the committee if it would like to recommend that Amherst College adopt a policy on students' recording class lectures. She shared the Mount Holyoke policy with the committee, and members offered a few minor revisions to that language. They then recommended that the dean share this policy with the college lawyer before forwarding it to the Committee of Six for its consideration:

To encourage active engagement and academic inquiry in the classroom, as well as to safeguard the privacy of students and faculty, no form of audio or visual recording in the classroom is permitted without explicit permission from the professor/instructor or without a letter from Accessibility Services authorizing the recording as an accommodation. Authorized recordings may only be used by a student who has obtained permission or an accommodation and may not be shared or distributed for any reason without the explicit consent of the professor or instructor. Violation of this policy is an infraction of the Amherst College Honor Code and academic regulations and will result in disciplinary action.

Guidelines for awarding half credits

Catherine S. said the committee would take up at its next meeting the issue of half credits and the apparent proliferation of courses available for half credits in the Music department.

The meeting adjourned at 10:00 a.m.