

Committee on Educational Policy (CEP)

April 15, 2016

In attendance: Faculty: Alexander George, acting chair; Klára Móricz; Sean Redding; Catherine Sanderson. Catherine Epstein, dean. Students: Samuel Keaser '16, Rashid (Chico) Kosber '17; Steven Ryu '16. Recorder: Nancy Ratner, Associate Dean of Admission and Researcher for Academic Projects.

Alexander George, Acting Chair of the Committee on Educational Policy (CEP), called to order the CEP meeting at 8:30 a.m. in the Kennick Room in Cooper House, and the committee approved the minutes from the meeting of April 8, 2016.

Announcements

Catherine E. announced that IT sent an email about the next round of course evaluations this morning. Unfortunately, the email had the wrong dates and went out under her name to all faculty. IT will now send another email with the correct dates.

Chico informed the committee that he has been elected vice president of the student government. He cannot continue in his capacity representing the student government on the CEP unless the chair of the CEP now requests that he continue. Otherwise, he feels he should step down and appoint another senator in his place. Committee members noted that he would be the only continuing student member and expressed an interest in having him continue. Catherine E. recommended that he ask the chair to write to the AAS, explaining the committee's interest in the continuity which he can provide.

Target-of-opportunity request

Alex asked the committee to consider a request for a senior rank target-of-opportunity (TO) appointment. The committee discussed the request.

Credit hours

Alex next asked the committee to consider the proposed change to Catalog language which will codify existing practice. The change, as proposed, would read:

Courses typically meet for ~~at least~~ three hours a week, with the expectation that **AN** additional ~~time may be spent~~ **NINE HOURS OF ACADEMIC ENGAGEMENT BE SPENT** in **CLASS**, lab, discussion, **OFFICE HOURS**, studio, film viewing, and/or preparatory work.

Catherine S. worried that students were not spending this amount of time, but Sean thought there was probably considerable variability in the amount of time that students spend. Catherine E. said that this is a statement of expectations, not a requirement that students spend this amount of time on each course. She thought that some students might be doing this amount of work per course but others not. Catherine S. said she was quite willing to add these expectations to her syllabi. Alex said he worried that this will breed a kind of cynicism among students. Chico thought this was an odd time to be introducing this language, given the conversations last semester about students' workload. He worried that the

stated expectations might frighten some students. Sam felt that, given the variability from course to course, students will make an effort to balance courses with large workloads with others with different kinds of work. Steven worried that these increased expectations might make students angry; students will feel the pressure to meet these expectations and will take them seriously. The committee acknowledged that this language is based on federal guidelines and places Amherst's expectations in compliance with those guidelines. The committee approved the new language.

Problems with exam scheduling

Alex next asked the committee to discuss an issue that has been raised by several faculty members regarding exam scheduling. Exams scheduled during the regularly scheduled class time can occasionally extend beyond the class period into other courses, particularly if the student has been given extended time due to a learning disability. The student then misses the next class if the student has contiguous courses. In response, some faculty have started scheduling exams in the evening so students will feel less time pressure during exam situations; these evening exams may then conflict with other evening activities, wreaking havoc on the music program and theater program.

Klára encouraged a policy in which faculty who schedule evening exams would offer two time slots so students would be able to choose a time that would not conflict with their other commitments. She thought this policy could also be extended to review sessions and film screenings. She also noted that students should be able to stream the film on their own if there's a conflict. Catherine S. pointed out that the Economics department would not want to have multiple times for exams because it could risk creating opportunities for academic dishonesty. Klára said the evening exams have devastated the theater and dance programs. The department is trying to accommodate these conflicts but is finding it very problematic.

Sean suggested designating one day a week for evening exams. Steven mentioned that many science majors will take two lab courses at a time, so that could create additional conflicts; the faculty would have to coordinate their evening exams. Looking at the schedule of music and theater rehearsals, Klára said only Friday would be available. She also noted that peer colleges are also struggling with this issue. Pomona reserves evenings from 7 pm until 10 pm for rehearsals. Alex suggested the college create two exam slots on one day; faculty could coordinate.

Klára was satisfied that if alternative times were scheduled for exams during non-classroom times, students would be able to find a time that worked. Film screenings could be offered in other ways. Sean said exams could be offered on consecutive evenings. Committee members then wondered whether students would opt for the extra days to study if exams were offered on consecutive days. They thought it might be preferable to offer two different times on one night, during an overlapping time period—e.g., from 5 pm to 7 pm and from 6 pm to 8 pm—as a way to prevent students from revealing questions to their peers. They thought the CEP should ask different departments if they would be willing to do this as a way to reduce conflicts. Catherine E. was concerned about the time demands this would place on faculty who would need to be available for an extended evening period. This might be especially onerous in the sciences which often have three-hour exams.

The committee next moved to the issue of students who require extended time, resulting in their exam extending into their next course. Sean thought there was now a significant population which requires extended time. If there were an exam center the issue of the classroom would no longer present a problem but this would not solve the problem of the student missing the next class. Klára said when students have extended time, she allows them to go to the library to complete the exam or to return after their other classes to complete the exam if they have a conflict. Catherine E. thought it might be helpful if the CEP made it clear that it is highly problematic if an exam extends beyond the class period. Sean pointed out that in the case of students who have a demonstrated need for additional time, this is not subject to negotiation. The college is required to give students with learning disabilities extra time, if mandated. Alex said it would be a stronger statement if the CEP could provide a positive solution. Catherine E. thought the most positive solution would be creating the two overlapping evening options, as suggested. Catherine S. suggested as an alternative allowing students to start an exam early. Options become less flexible if cheating is a concern. She thought it would be helpful if the CEP wrote a letter to the faculty asking colleagues to be mindful of this problem and suggesting some options for how to avoid this. Chico asked that the letter also encourage faculty to work with their colleagues to stagger exams so students do not have multiple exams on the same day.

The meeting adjourned at 9:50 a.m.