

Committee on Educational Policy

April 13, 2023

In attendance: Faculty: Robert Benedetto, Chair; David Hanneke; Mekhola Gomes; Chris Kingston; Geoffrey Sanborn. Students: Gent Malushaga '25. Provost and Dean of the Faculty: Catherine Epstein, ex officio. Recorder: Nancy Ratner, Director of Academic Projects.

Rob Benedetto, chair, called the meeting to order at 2:30 p.m. in Porter Lounge, and the committee approved the minutes from the previous meeting.

New Courses

The committee approved additional courses.

Film and Media Studies Proposal (FAMS)

Rob asked the committee to return to its discussion of the Film and Media Studies (FAMS) request to become a department.

Rob said, hearing a negative decision, he would write a letter to FAMS that it was declining to recommend to the Faculty Executive Committee that FAMS become a department.

FTE Recommendations

Rob asked the committee to review its recommendations. The committee approved the letter.

Questions from Committee Members

Dave noted during advising that documentation of the College's educational policy has resulted in out-of-date information on the Registrar's web page. Permission forms (Five College permission, five-course permission) refer to outdated procedures and are unclear about whether forms need to be printed, emailed, or bypassed entirely. The new honors policy has not been updated, nor has the point-system for Amherst grades, now nearly two years out-of-date. Advisors were never informed about the new Workday procedures for students to declare majors. He noted that the Registrar's office has been very responsive and helpful but hoped these issues would soon be updated. Catherine said the registrar is aware of this issue, but is short of personnel; it will make this a top priority for this summer.

Course Tag Request

Christina Santana, associate director of community learning, proposed that the CEP add a new course tag to help students and faculty differentiate between courses that have a stated objective of linking learning inside the classroom to local issues (AC) and those that are co-designed with representatives from local organizations, public schools, and institutions and result in applying a theoretical foundation for action to projects in the community (CBL).

Gent noted that students do not use keywords to search for courses and said he thought the differences between the two proposed keywords would be too subtle for most people. Faculty should instead be

explicit about these aspects in the course descriptions, which students do read. Rob said the CEP should probably discuss at some point whether to continue with course keywords since many are so over-used as to be meaningless. The committee thought the ones worth retaining might be those identifying science courses for non-majors, writing-intensive courses, and sophomore seminars. Geoff suggested explaining to Christina that these distinctions are overly complicated and would add complexity rather than simplification and clarity. Catherine added that the Center for Community Engagement could outline criteria for a CBL course and only allow the CBL tag only for courses that fit those criteria. They would then need to monitor who used the CBL tags. Rob said he would write to Christina.

Comprehensives and Capstone Courses

Rob mentioned that students to be awarded the Bachelor of Arts degree, according to the College Catalog, under [Degree Requirements](#), must “complete the requirements for a major in a department or a group of departments, including satisfactory performance in the comprehensive evaluation.” In the past, all departments had either a comprehensive exam or a capstone requirement, but these have changed over the years. He asked whether accreditation requirements required a capstone or comprehensive exam. Catherine said that she didn’t know the answer to the question about accreditation requirements, but she thought this was an important reputational issue related to how Amherst represents itself as a college. Geoff said his department had a capstone symposium but found it took too much energy to do anything meaningful and had dropped it. Other departments have also dropped their requirements. Catherine said the requirement only applies to students who are not writing a senior thesis. Those students should have a meaningful conclusion to their major. Dave said the question is whether a department will actually fail a student. Rob suggested the committee continue this conversation next week.

The meeting adjourned at 3:50 p.m.