

Committee on Educational Policy (CEP)

December 1, 2015

In attendance: Faculty: David S. Hall, chair; Alexander George; Caroline Goutte; Klára Móricz; Sean Redding. 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.

David Hall, Chair of the Committee on Educational Policy (CEP), called to order the CEP meeting at 3:00 p.m. in the Physics and Astronomy Meeting Room (Merrill Science Center 222) and the committee approved the minutes of the meeting of November 17, 2015.

Updates and announcements

Catherine reported that the Committee of Six supported the early marching proposal; it will now move forward to the faculty. The Committee of Six also discussed restricting faculty access to their students' transcripts but expressed interest in faculty retaining access to some information. Catherine said she is discussing the possible changes with the registrar.

Course proposal letter

The committee, after a brief discussion, decided it might be helpful if faculty identified courses that address issues of race, class, and gender; new keywords will be created for those topics. The committee also discussed the possibility of creating course lists--such as science courses for non-majors--that might aid advising and course selection. Caroline mentioned that Cornell features on its websites clusters of courses that address common themes that cross departments. Committee members thought this would be a wonderful way to draw students' attention during advising to courses they might not have otherwise considered. Chico pointed out that courses with keywords can be easily identified by clicking on the keyword tab in the "Course scheduler," but this is an option that is apparently not well known. The committee decided the course proposal letter should be revised to draw faculty attention to this option, should encourage faculty to add keywords, including the newly created tags on issues of race, class, and gender, and should alert faculty to the "required consent" option.

Internship credit proposal

Catherine shared a request from the Career Center that would allow students to incorporate relevant internship experience into a special topics course. The request noted that some internships require students to earn credit for an unpaid internship. Since Amherst does not award academic credit for internships, students would be able to participate in particular internships only if they have a letter stating that they will take a special topics course the following semester. The student would need the instructor's permission, a title for the course, a summary of the work to be completed, a bibliography, a plan of study, and the department's permission. The Career Center would then write a letter to the internship host stating that the student has pre-registered for the special topics course.

The committee met this request with some initial skepticism, especially when told that the students do not actually have to follow through with the special topics course. David wondered whether the course

could be offered for half-credit. Klára thought asking faculty to offer special topics that intersect with internships would put faculty into an untenable position, particularly if the student does not follow through with the special topics course. Others noted that they did not have time to teach these courses and feared this might place pressure on them to agree to oversee such a course.

Chico wondered whether this was especially important for international students whose visa issues may be affected by an internship that does not result in a credit-bearing course. Sean also wondered whether these might be internships at companies that did not want to pay students but could justify the internship if the student received course credit. The committee concluded it needed more information, including data on the number of students who would be affected, whether there is an international component, and the types of internships this would cover.

Faculty meeting with students on the academic workload

Catherine said the Curriculum Committee will take up some of the issues that were raised by students regarding the academic workload, but she also noted that if the CEP wanted to propose actions, it is in a position to move more quickly; she did not think the CEP should feel it had to wait for the Curriculum Committee to act. David then shared notes from the conversation.

Committee members thought the college should change its policy requiring a student to be failing a course before qualifying for a tutor. Catherine noted that this is a resource issue; some departments can readily supply tutors but other departments do not have enough qualified tutors to meet the demand. She reported that her office is already planning to make the Q-Center a more professional center, along the lines of the Writing Center; a more professional Q-Center may help address some of these needs.

Caroline thought better advising could help students. She said she reviewed the data on students in her introductory biology courses and was surprised to find that some students who had struggled in first year science courses had gone on to enroll in two challenging lab science courses simultaneously rather than spread them out to allow a better chance for success. With better information, students could be advised not to take two demanding science lab courses in the same semester if they have already experienced difficulty in previous courses. Klára thought greater flexibility, with variable credits for courses, could also help. Catherine reported that the Curriculum Committee has discussed the possibility of additional credits for lab courses. Steven explained that students who want to stay on the science track may feel they need to double up their lab courses so they can take upper level science courses.

Klára said students are reluctant to prioritize; they want to do everything. Faculty need to find a way to help students see that they cannot manage multiple activities while undertaking courses at the college level, even if they were able to balance a variety of activities during high school. Sean said students are often unrealistic about how many extra-curricular activities they can manage.

Alex recommended the committee consider changes to the pass/fail options and also think about relaxing the rules around withdrawals. Klára also suggested offering some intensive courses during interterm. Catherine suggested it might also be possible to allow some faculty, on a voluntary basis, to

offer courses during the summer. The committee agreed to discuss these and other ideas at a future meeting. The meeting adjourned at 4:25 pm.