

**Committee on Educational Policy**  
**December 11, 2019**

**In attendance: Faculty: Tekla Harms; Edward Melillo, chair; Christian Rogowski; Krupa Shandilya; Adam Sitze. Provost and Dean of the Faculty: Catherine Epstein, *ex officio*. Students: Gabriel Echarte '22; Sterling Kee '23; Julia Ralph '21. Recorder: Nancy Ratner, Director of Academic Projects.**

Edward, chair of the Committee on Educational Policy (CEP), called the meeting to order at 8:45 a.m. in Clark House 100. The committee approved the minutes of November 20, 2019 and December 4, 2019.

Tekla then inquired about the reading period rules, asking whether faculty were permitted to distribute a take-home exam prior to the beginning of the reading period. Catherine said that would not abide by the spirit of the current rules, but students on the committee thought it should be permitted.

**Target-of-opportunity**

Edward asked the committee to turn next to the request for a target-of-opportunity appointment. The committee reviewed the guidelines for target-of-opportunity requests and concluded that this request would meet the criteria.

**Changes to the Course Catalog**

The committee returned to policies surrounding the FGO, course requirements, and readmission. Edward mentioned that the class deans would like to clarify whether the FGO could be used for a first-year seminar class. The committee did not think it should be permitted. Adam asked whether the registrar has a way to track when the grade is posted, since this will be essential under the FGO rules. Nancy verified that the Registrar will know both the date that the grade has been posted by the professor and also when it has been verified by the Registrar's office. The committee approved the revised language in all three sections of the Catalog. Edward said he will now send these revised policies to the class deans for a final vetting, and after he has heard from them, he will forward the policies to the Committee of Six.

**DEGREE REQUIREMENT**

Course Requirements:

All students except Independent Scholars are normally required to elect four full courses each semester. Students may elect one or two half courses in addition to four full courses at their discretion and without special permission. **FOR COURSES WITH AN ASSOCIATED LAB (WHERE THE LAB AND LECTURE CARRY THE SAME COURSE NUMBER), THE LAB COMPONENT NEED NOT BE COUNTED AS AN ADDITIONAL HALF COURSE. UNDER NO CIRCUMSTANCES DO ASSOCIATED LABS REQUIRE ADDITIONAL PERMISSIONS.**

In exceptional cases a student may, with the permission of both the student's academic advisor and class dean, take five full courses for credit during a given semester. Such permission is normally granted only to students of demonstrated superior academic ability, responsibility, and will. Fifth courses cannot be used to accelerate graduation. On occasion, a student who has failed a course may be permitted to take a fifth course in a given semester if, in the judgment of the Committee on Academic Standing, this additional work can be undertaken without jeopardizing the successful completion of all courses taken in that semester. ~~Students~~

may only retake a course for which they have received a failing grade or from which they have withdrawn in a prior semester.

Half courses are ~~not~~ normally **NOT** included in the requirement of thirty-two courses for the degree. **H**; however, with the permission of the academic advisor and the class dean, a student may combine two half courses to be counted as equivalent to a full course, **PROVIDED THE HALF COURSES MATCH IN A MANNER APPROVED BY THE OFFERING DEPARTMENT(S). IN THIS CASE, THE STUDENT EITHER** (1) ~~the student~~ completes the 4.5 courses in one semester and 3.5 courses in a subsequent semester, or (2) **TAKES** the two halves match **HALF COURSES** within the same semester ~~in a manner designated by the offering department, with the approval of the offering department~~ (in this case, the student's program will be three or four full courses and two half courses). No more than four half courses may be so combined for credit toward the degree. **STUDENTS SHOULD BE ADVISED THAT TAKING 3.5 COURSES IN A SEMESTER IS AN EXCEPTION TO THE REQUIREMENT OF FOUR FULL COURSES EACH SEMESTER AND IS INTENDED TO PROVIDE FLEXIBILITY FOR WORKLOAD MANAGEMENT, PRIMARILY WITHIN A STUDENT'S FIRST AND SECOND YEARS. THEREAFTER, TAKING 3.5 COURSES IS APPROPRIATE ONLY IN THE CASE OF DOCUMENTED EMERGENCIES.**

A student who by failing a course incurs a deficiency in the number of courses required for normal progress toward graduation is usually expected to make up that course deficiency by taking a three- or four-semester hour course at another approved institution during the summer prior to the first semester of the next academic year and no later than the semester prior to the student's last semester at Amherst. **ALL COURSE DEFICIENCIES MUST NORMALLY BE MADE UP PRIOR TO THE FIRST SEMESTER OF THE FINAL YEAR, EXCEPT THOSE ARISING IN THE FINAL YEAR, IN WHICH CASE THEY MUST BE MADE UP PRIOR TO GRADUATION. ALL MAKE-UP COURSES MUST BE APPROVED IN ADVANCE BY THE REGISTRAR.** Courses taken by a student after withdrawing from Amherst College, ~~as part of a graduate or professional program in which that student is enrolled,~~ are not applicable toward an Amherst College undergraduate degree.

**STUDENTS MAY ONLY RETAKE A COURSE FOR WHICH THEY HAVE RECEIVED A FAILING GRADE OR FROM WHICH THEY HAVE WITHDRAWN IN A PRIOR SEMESTER.**

Students may not add courses after the last day of add/drop at the beginning of each semester or drop courses after this date except as follows:

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 **AMHERST COLLEGE COURSE WITHDRAWAL** 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.

**STUDENTS STUDYING OFF-CAMPUS IN AN APPROVED PROGRAM MAY EXERCISE THEIR SINGLE AMHERST COLLEGE COURSE WITHDRAWAL WITH THE APPROVAL OF THEIR ACADEMIC ADVISOR AND THEIR CLASS DEAN, PROVIDED THEY HAVE EXHAUSTED THOSE ACADEMIC RESOURCES THAT ARE AVAILABLE THROUGH THE OFF-CAMPUS PROGRAM AND PROVIDED THEIR REQUEST IS MADE TO THEIR CLASS DEAN PRIOR TO THE FINAL THREE WEEKS OF THE OFF-CAMPUS STUDY PROGRAM.**

**WITH PERMISSION OF THEIR CLASS DEAN AND THROUGH PROCEDURES OVERSEEN BY THE OFFICE OF ACCESSIBILITY SERVICES, STUDENTS WITH DOCUMENTED HEALTH ISSUES THAT ALLOW A REDUCED COURSE LOAD OF THREE FULL COURSES IN A GIVEN SEMESTER MAY GRADUATE WITH A TOTAL OF 31 COURSES. ACCOMMODATIONS MUST BE APPROVED PRIOR TO THE END OF THE ADD/DROP PERIOD OF THE SEMESTER IN WHICH A REDUCED COURSE LOAD IS TO BE TAKEN.**

Further exceptions shall be made for **DOCUMENTED EMERGENCIES, (HERE UNDERSTOOD AS** disabling medical reasons or ~~for reason of~~ grave personal emergencies, **RATHER THAN ACADEMIC DIFFICULTIES)**, and shall be made by the class dean.

~~All course deficiencies must normally be made up prior to the first semester of the final year, except those arising in the final year, in which case they must be made up prior to graduation. All make-up courses must be approved in advance by the registrar.~~

~~Courses taken by a student after withdrawing from Amherst College, as part of a graduate or professional program in which that student is enrolled, are not applicable toward an Amherst College undergraduate degree.~~

## **FLEXIBLE GRADING AND PASS/FAIL OPTIONS**

The ~~AIM purpose~~ of the Flexible Grading Option (FGO) is to encourage students **TO TAKE INTELLECTUAL RISKS, TO** explore the breadth of Amherst's open curriculum, **AND TO REWARD STUDENTS FOR ENGAGING FULLY IN ALL THEIR COURSES.** ~~to explore the breadth of Amherst's open curriculum as they seek to meet the college's stated learning goals.~~

**THE FLEXIBLE GRADING OPTION IS PROVIDED IN LIEU OF A CONVENTIONAL SYSTEM OF PASS/FAIL. STUDENTS WHO ELECT THIS OPTION FOR A GIVEN COURSE MAY CHOOSE TO HAVE EITHER A "P" RECORDED ON THEIR TRANSCRIPT OR THE GRADE ASSIGNED BY THEIR PROFESSOR, PROVIDED THE GRADE IS A "D" OR HIGHER. A FAILING GRADE WILL IN ALL CASES BE RECORDED AS AN "F."**

**STUDENTS WHO WISH TO USE THIS OPTION SHOULD TAKE TWO STEPS:**

1. ~~To elect a course as FGO,~~ **THE DECISION TO ELECT THE FGO OPTION FOR A COURSE SHOULD BE MADE IN THE CONTEXT OF A CONVERSATION WITH THE ADVISOR ABOUT THE MEANING AND PURPOSE OF THE LIBERAL ARTS EDUCATION AND THE IMPORTANCE OF EXPLORING THE BREADTH OF AMHERST'S OPEN CURRICULUM. FOLLOWING THIS,** students must file the FGO form, signed by their advisor(s), with the Office of the Registrar by the end of the add-drop period. Instructor permission is not required on the FGO form, and instructors are not informed if students have elected the FGO option for their course.

2. ~~Students will have five days after the date grades are due to~~ **NO LATER THAN FIVE DAYS AFTER THE FINAL GRADE IS POSTED ON AC DATA, STUDENTS MUST CHOOSE ONE OF TWO OPTIONS: THEY MUST** either accept the grade assigned by the instructor, or, in the case of passing grades ("D" or better), elect to have a pass ("P") displayed on their transcript for the course. (No grade-point equivalent will be assigned to a "Pass.") If the letter grade assigned by the instructor is an "F," an "F" will be recorded. If the student takes no action, the assigned grade will remain on the transcript **PERMANENTLY. IT IS THE RESPONSIBILITY OF STUDENTS TO MONITOR AC DATA FOR THE APPEARANCE OF THEIR FINAL GRADES**

**THERE ARE A NUMBER OF RESTRICTIONS ON THE USE OF THIS OPTION.** Students who enter Amherst College as first-years may elect to take up to four of the total number of courses required for the degree under the FGO; transfer students who enter as sophomores may elect to take up to three courses required for the degree under the FGO; and transfer students who enter as juniors may elect to take up to two courses required for the degree under the FGO. Students may not take more than one such course in any one semester. **FINALLY, FIRST-YEAR SEMINARS AND** courses taken in the second semester of the senior year are not eligible for the FGO.

**IN EXTREMELY RARE CIRCUMSTANCES, THE COLLEGE MAY ALLOW STUDENTS TO USE THIS OPTION TO MANAGE EXCEPTIONAL PERSONAL PROBLEMS.** IN CASES OF DOCUMENTED EMERGENCES (AS DISTINCT FROM ACADEMIC DIFFICULTIES) ~~In exceptional circumstances,~~ and only once during their career at Amherst College, students who have not previously exhausted their FGOs and have not elected an FGO in that semester may, with the permission of their instructor, academic advisor, and class dean, convert one course to an FGO after the end of the add/drop period **AND BEFORE THE LAST DAY OF CLASSES IN THAT SEMESTER.**

**SENIORS WHO HAVE DOCUMENTED EMERGENCIES, AND WHO HAVE EXHAUSTED THEIR FGO OPTIONS,** may, with the permission of their instructor, academic advisor, and class dean, convert one course to Pass/Fail after the end of the add/drop period **AND BEFORE THE LAST DAY OF CLASSES IN THAT SEMESTER. THIS OPTION IS NOT AVAILABLE DURING A SEMESTER IN WHICH THE STUDENT ALREADY HAS ELECTED TO TAKE A COURSE UNDER THE FGO.**

Second-semester seniors who have not exhausted their FGO options may select one course to be taken Pass/Fail. To do this, seniors submit a Pass/Fail form, signed by their advisor(s) and the course instructor, to the registrar by the end of the add-drop period. (No grade-point equivalent will be assigned to a "Pass.")

## **READMISSION**

All students requesting readmission after voluntary withdrawals, involuntary withdrawals, medical leaves, and academic dismissals and all students on educational leaves who wish to return for the fall semester should write to their class deans as early as possible, but before March 15. For students planning to return for the spring semester, the letters should be received by the College before November 1.

Provisional Administrative Readmission following leave may be offered by the Office of Student Affairs to facilitate processes such as pre-registration and housing where appropriate. However,

students must complete all readmission requirements by August 15 for fall and January 5 for spring.

In some cases, additional information, such as an interview on-campus, may be requested. Readmission requests from students seeking to return from academic dismissals and, in some cases from medical leaves, voluntary and involuntary withdrawals, will be referred to the Committee on Academic Standing or the Office of Student Affairs. In these cases, detailed letters requesting readmission, accompanied by grade reports of courses taken at an approved college or university, letters from employers, medical documentation, and other documents supporting the readmission requests should be sent to the Office of Student Affairs. **AMHERST COLLEGE DOES NOT GRANT ACADEMIC CREDIT FOR WORK COMPLETED AT OTHER INSTITUTIONS OF HIGHER EDUCATION DURING A VOLUNTARY WITHDRAWAL.** Students on educational leaves should simply confirm their intention of returning to the campus before the above stated dates. Failure to meet these deadlines will jeopardize students' opportunities to participate in the student residence room selection.

**THE COLLEGE DOES NOT PERMIT READMISSION FOLLOWING A THIRD ACADEMIC DISMISSAL.**

#### ACADEMIC CREDIT FROM OTHER INSTITUTIONS (Transfer Credit)

Amherst College does not grant academic credit for work completed at other institutions of higher education unless it meets one of the following criteria: (1) each course offered as part of a transfer record has been completed and accepted by the College prior to matriculation at Amherst; (2) the work is part of an exchange program of study in the United States or abroad [approved](#) in advance by a class dean and the Registrar; or (3) the work has been [approved](#) by the Registrar as appropriate to make up a deficiency deriving from work not completed or failed at Amherst College (see [Deficiencies](#)); (4) The work has been approved by the Registrar as appropriate to meet conditions of involuntary leave or medical withdrawal.

#### **Committee on Student Learning and Success (CSLS)**

At 9:15 a.m., Edward welcomed some of the members of the Ad Hoc Committee on Student Learning and Success (CSLS): Dean Liz Agosto, Professors Pat O'Hara and Adam Honig, and Riley Caldwell-O'Keefe, director of the Center for Teaching and Learning. Pat, chair of the CSLS, provided some background on the committee's thinking. She said the ad hoc committee was formed on the basis of recommendations from the Ad Hoc Curriculum Committee and Committee of Six for a three-year period.

Committee members began their work earlier this year by considering how the college might make the curriculum more accessible to students with disabilities. An external report on accessibility services had recommended that the faculty post course expectations in their syllabi and make these syllabi available to students prior to pre-registration. Upon consideration, the CSLS realized that posting syllabi three to five months before the semester began would greatly constrain course development. The committee rejected that idea and also rejected a suggestion to create an institutional template to identify course expectations, an approach adopted by some peer institutions. Instead, the CSLS is thinking of recommending that all course descriptions disclose the most essential elements for mastery of the material. Clarifying course expectations could help reduce stress for students with disabilities and might be beneficial to the entire student body.

Continuing, Pat said that, in consultation with counsel and the accessibility office, the committee developed a list of ten categories of work that might be essential to mastery of a course; the committee thought that knowing these in advance would satisfy most of the concerns of students who receive

accommodations. (This list does not address the accommodation for flexible attendance, which the CSLS considered far more complicated.) If approved, this list would become part of the CMS course description and would be linked to the course scheduler to make the information easily available to students. All faculty would be required to complete this section for each of their courses. This approach has the advantage of adopting the best UDL (“universal design for learning”) principles, which are intended to help all students make more informed course choices; these could have the added benefit of reducing course shopping.

The committee also examined department websites and recommended some website redesign to achieve greater consistency between department pages. A working group has now been assembled and has begun to tackle this issue.

Tekla asked whether there is even a requirement that a course have a syllabus. Pat thought this was unclear, but she thought faculty would all be capable of articulating their work expectations—activities such as in-class exams, lab work, etc.—since most instructors would have already established these expectations when submitting a course description.

Riley said the committee met with Jodi Foley (Office of Accessibilities Services), Shivaji Kumar (IT), and Justin Smith (Legal Counsel) and thought both about legal requirements and student success. Riley then explained that there are three pillars of universal course design: multiple means of engagement, of representation, and of expression. Providing a range of ways to engage improves students’ intrinsic motivation, helps them find coping skills and strategies, optimizes their choices, offers them autonomy, and minimizes the degree to which they feel threatened and distracted. Multiple means of expression allows students to engage their executive functioning, supporting planning and strategy development, and makes transparent the instructor’s pedagogical choices.

Continuing, Riley said revealing the work required for mastery of the course would make the course expectations more transparent. While some of these terms overlap with current keywords (attention to writing, attention to research, attention to speaking, and attention to artistic practice)—the CSLS and CEP will need to decide how to manage these—identifying work required would help support student success and should be manageable for faculty.

Adam Honig noted that the CSLS is in effect proposing additional keywords. The committee’s purpose in coming to the CEP is to learn whether the CEP would support the principle of doing this, whether the CEP thinks this might be a good idea, and whether this list includes the right set of categories. He also asked what the CEP thought about requiring all faculty to identify whether their courses required these kinds of expectations for course mastery, since this will only work if all faculty members participate. He pointed out that required participation could have the beneficial side effect of encouraging faculty to identify other keywords that apply to their courses.

Pat added that both Jodi and Justin thought these would help satisfy the external committee’s recommendation that the faculty be required to post their syllabi prior to pre-registration. Riley said there are many different ideas of what a syllabus should do. This approach would standardize the major components used in assessing whether a student has mastered the work for a course. The CSLS also looked at other models, such as the approach used by Princeton and Brown and drew on some of their ideas.

Christian expressed a concern these terms approach the issue from a negative direction, identifying work that some students may want to avoid. Liz said this was not the intent. The idea is to help students build a schedule with four courses in which they can be successful. Pat pointed out that avoidance happens anyway, but currently it occurs during add-drop, not during pre-registration. The CSLS hopes that this will allow students to think about how to balance their course load at an earlier stage, preferably when meeting with their advisor.

Gabe noted that these are important skills. He worried that students would use this information to avoid working on particular skills that they find difficult. Adam Honig said students will eventually become aware of course expectations; this just allows them to know the expectations at an earlier stage. Gabe said he would prefer finding a way to help students work on skills that they find difficult. Liz explained that the purpose of this is to help students balance their course load so they can work on one problem at a time. It allows students to opt in. Riley said the committee started with a list of 40 items and also looked at the workload calculator used by Rice University. The CSLS decided instead to focus its efforts on finding something every faculty member could do.

Krupa asked whether this list would be contractual; she said she sometimes decides to change a course mid-semester if she finds students' needs require a different approach. Liz said it would not be contractual. Tekla asked what would happen if the college did none of this. Would that be considered discriminatory? Liz said it would and the college would be considered non-compliant. Faculty need to supply information about the central functions of their courses.

Tekla advised against using the term "universal" which faculty will find off-putting. She added that it is important for students to learn to deal with uncertainty. She did not want the college to remove all uncertainty from their lives. She also noted that the list ignores central aspects of her courses: students in lab courses may need to be on their feet for an extended period; they may need to be dexterous; they may need to be willing to speak; they may need to be capable of visual examination of physical materials (this is a significant threshold)—and these activities are all important to students with physical disabilities. Edward agreed, noting that this year he had to make radical revisions to his course when high enrollments made his original intentions impractical. He wondered how this list would restrict the faculty's ability to adapt and think on their feet. It could result in the inverse of the intention of the policy. Even if it's not contractual, he thought it could prove problematic. Liz said this is the reason for trying to keep this at a high level. A certain amount of uncertainty and ability to handle change is important. She did not want to box people into areas. This is an attempt to achieve transparency.

Sterling asked what the motive was for doing this outside the shopping period. What about once the shopping period starts? Krupa agreed, noting that she usually posts this sort of information on the first day of class on Moodle. Sterling asked if that would be on the course site; only those registered for the course have access to the information on Moodle. Pat said some aspects of accessibility require a lot of advance work. Students with visual impairments, for example, must have all of their materials converted to a form that is accessible. While the CSLS does not want to limit the shopping period for those students, it does believe that it can reduce their stress by clarifying some things in advance of the shopping period.

Christian asked where in the ten categories certain expectations (such as the need to be able to view various kinds of materials) are reflected. He liked the spirit behind this but thought there were some important areas that were not represented and that might be critical to success. Pat said "heavy reading" would be one such area. Catherine said the college converts materials to make them accessible

once the student has registered for the course. Liz added that while the goal is not to eliminate shopping, having more information in advance might reduce shopping somewhat.

Adam Sitze said the committee had not talked about flexible attendance but he thought the CSLS had done a fine job identifying a relatively non-intrusive way to bring the College into compliance. He suggested the CSLS soften the language on flexible attendance. In principle, he said was in favor of the CSLS approach, although he shared many of his colleagues' concerns.

Edward thanked the visitors and the meeting adjourned at 9:52 a.m.