

**Committee on Educational Policy
December 18, 2019**

In attendance: Faculty: Tekla Harms; Edward Melillo, chair; Christian Rogowski; Adam Sitze. Provost and Dean of the Faculty: Catherine Epstein, *ex officio*. Recorder: Nancy Ratner, Director of Academic Projects.

Edward Melillo, chair of the Committee on Educational Policy (CEP), called the meeting to order at 9:00 a.m. in Clark House 100.

FTE target-of-opportunity (TO) request

Edward asked the committee to consider a request for a target-of-opportunity (TO) hire, identified during a national search. The department pointed to the real shortage of candidates in this field and the excellence of this particular candidate. Catherine explained that allocation of this FTE meets the TO guidelines which allow for a situation in which there is “a genuine dearth of such candidates in the field.”

Tekla said that she wished that departments that put forward TO candidates identified during a national search would explain in their request why the TO candidate was not the department’s first choice to fill the advertised position. Christian also thought that information would be helpful. Nancy suggested the committee insert the following sentence into the first paragraph of the TO guidelines:

If the candidate has emerged during a national search, the department also explains its decision not to prioritize hiring this candidate for the advertised position and its reasons for giving top priority for the advertised position to a different candidate, rather than to the target-of-opportunity candidate.

The committee supported adding this to the guidelines.

Responding to Tekla’s earlier concern, Catherine said that the purpose of TO hires is not solely to diversify the faculty; it can also be used to diversify the curriculum and has been used for this purpose more than once. Nancy noted that the broader criteria for TOs emerged early in the development of the TO guidelines and was a recommendation of the college lawyer.

Adam asked what ordinarily happens to a tenure line when a colleague passes away. Does the department retain the line or does it lose the line and then need to request it again from the CEP? Catherine said that, as with retirements, the line returns to the FTE pool and the department must submit an FTE request to replace the colleague who has passed away. Tekla said that after the loss of a colleague departments might consider waiting and reflecting before requesting a replacement. Adam asked if there is a finite pool of TO positions. Catherine said there is not, but TOs can only be allocated if the department is willing to mortgage another FTE to the position. Not every department is in a position to make that commitment. She also noted that she discourages some departments from bringing these kinds of requests to the CEP if they do not have the ability to mortgage a position. The committee agreed to support the request for the TO hire.

FTE process

Edward asked the committee to turn next to the process for reviewing FTEs this year. Tekla thought the committee should have some additional information about the departments requesting FTEs. She

wondered, in particular, whether the requesting departments have scheduled their courses in overlapping time slots or whether they have scheduled across the week and across the time slots, as requested by the committee. Nancy said she would request that information from Jesse Barba.

Continuing, Tekla noted that every allocation of an expansion FTE means that eventually another department will not receive a replacement FTE. She regretted that the college no longer had a clearly stated mechanism for allocating expansion positions. The last time the trustees allocated new faculty expansion positions, the Committee on Academic Priorities (CAP) specified criteria for hiring.

Catherine said the college has received one additional FTE line as a result of fundraising for the current campaign, and she expects there will be a few more if fundraising continues to be successful, raising the FTE cap slightly. Tekla was pleased to hear this but still felt the college should have a mechanism for allocating the expansion positions. She said the lack of these criteria weighs heavily on her because the committee is about to make difficult decisions. The CEP must ask itself each time whether this expansion is necessary for the college. Adam asked if there were any college-wide documents that could guide the committee in this process. Catherine said the Curriculum Committee did not choose to make recommendations in that area.

Tekla said the lack of guidance makes these and other decisions especially difficult. Later this year, the committee will consider the Education Studies proposal. When a new program that is not tethered to a particular department is approved, she always wonders whether the program will continue or falter. It is hard to tell a department that it needs to continue to replace faculty in an area that the department itself may not be committed to supporting. Each decision for a new program binds the college into the future. The committee needs to be particularly thoughtful about such proposals. Should there be more offerings on Africa? Should there be more offerings in Asian-American studies? Catherine agreed; Amherst cannot replicate a university. In recent years, the college has added new programs in Latinx and Latin American Studies, Film and Media Studies, and Architectural Studies. How many more are necessary?

Christian said the same reasoning applies to certificate programs. The certificates guide students toward particular courses, and this sometimes prevents the students from spreading their courses across a more diverse set of fields. Edward agreed but said the certificates do help encourage students to try courses at other colleges. As for new programs, he said if the college appears to be ignoring a fundamental issue of our time, this would probably be reflected in the program request, which is likely to cite offerings at other institutions in its evidence of major trends.

Catherine agreed with Tekla that there is no mechanism for figuring out what might be important for the college, and this is even more fraught when there is no department that feels a need to sponsor the program. This may be the case with African Studies. Edward said that area might be important for History, but the department has prioritized other needs at the moment. Tekla observed that much of this falls to the somewhat random choices of who happens to teach here at any given time.

Catherine pointed out that the number of available FTEs has slowed from about ten per year to just half that number. This reduction will put further pressure on new programs. Adam asked whether the overall coherence of a department's curriculum could be a valid consideration in reviewing FTE requests, and asked for guidance about how to think about this overall coherence. Catherine said sometimes requests are not very strong. Adam then asked whether enrollments are considered when reviewing FTE requests. Catherine said enrollment pressures play a role, but the need to represent certain curricular

areas plays a role too. Christian said he thought requests should also address college-wide concerns, not just department concerns. Tekla pointed out that the committee can look at other aspects when thinking about FTEs, such as whether the department is placing low enrollment caps on its introductory courses, limiting students' access, or teaching all of its courses in overlapping time slots.

Curricular Practical Training (CPT)

Returning to an earlier topic, Catherine said there will be a CPT course which is now moving through the course proposal system. Students will be required to have declared a major before enrolling in the course. Matteo Riondato has volunteered to teach the course in the fall, and other faculty have indicated an interest in offering the course in future years. Tekla asked whether participation in this program could be taken into account during tenure evaluation, documenting the faculty member's investment of time (time that is taken away from research). Catherine thought that could be mentioned.

Course information

Catherine informed the committee that she would like to publish the full slate of courses for the coming year prior to spring pre-registration. Students want this information, which would help them plan their programs and plan for study abroad. This was done a few years ago, but was not continued for some reason. The committee supported this idea. Faculty might need to determine their teaching times a year in advance, but that would be the only possible difficulty.

Intensive-writing instruction

The committee then returned to its discussion of intensive-writing instruction. Catherine said she has had a number of robust conversations with faculty about how to proceed, but disagreement remains about what should be done. She has heard widespread agreement that faculty members should teach these courses. To do so may require some support from the Writing Center or the UMass writing program. She did not think tenure-line faculty could be expected to teach more than one of these courses per year, and she has heard disagreement about what the courses should include. She asked whether the CEP agreed that these courses are different from just focusing closely on writing in class. She said she felt the college is doing a disservice to students in not offering more of these, and she was not convinced that the appropriate students were taking these classes; nor did she know how many of these courses were actually needed. Nancy said she has requested information from Admission on the need for the courses.

The committee thought the CEP should return to the departments which received an FTE in exchange for regularly offering an intensive-writing course. The committee then asked whether those courses really focused appropriately on the teaching of writing. Tekla suggested asking the departments to state that intensive-writing courses do not count towards the major. Catherine agreed that this would likely increase the focus on writing instruction; it is very difficult to address significant content in an intensive-writing course. Christian wondered if that would place the most vulnerable students at a disadvantage if a course in a field they wish to major in does not count toward the major. Tekla thought it would not since the majority of courses that a student takes do not count towards the major. Edward said he was not convinced that the content really needed to be reduced. Adam said he was preparing to teach a course now that focuses heavily on students' writing and has found that he really does need to reduce the content to do this. He asked whether there was any reason to think specially trained people should be hired to teach these courses. Catherine said she thought that if the college hired lecturers to teach writing-intensive courses, that these courses should be tethered to a department and should hold a PhD in a liberal arts discipline. She thought this was appropriate in the Amherst context, because it ensures that the course will also provide an intellectual experience.

Tekla said she had taught an ILS course when she first arrived at Amherst—faculty were told they all had to teach such a course—and it did not go well. She thought she could now do it much better and thought it might be best to focus on faculty who are nearing the ends of their careers. Catherine said she is intrigued by the idea of hiring a lecturer within a discipline who would have the teaching of these courses as a primary duty.

Edward asked whether there might be a positive incentive that would encourage faculty to participate in teaching these courses. Catherine said it is a job that faculty need to do. Tekla said she was put off by the idea that faculty must be trained to do this and thought some faculty might find that idea intimidating. Edward thought the FYS model, with weekly writing and reduced content, was a good one. Nancy wondered whether the committee might want to ask departments requesting FTEs to address in their letter the ways in which they are contributing to various college-wide goals (e.g., offering service courses for the pre-med program, teaching in the FYS program, teaching intensive-writing courses). Edward agreed that departments need to contribute to these responsibilities more equally.

The meeting adjourned at 10:00 a.m.