

Committee on Educational Policy February 17, 2021

In attendance: Faculty: Sandra Burkett; Nicola Courtright; Edward Melillo, chair; Krupa Shandilya; Adam Sitze. Provost and Dean of the Faculty: Catherine Epstein, *ex officio*. Students: Nicholas Graber-Mitchell '22; Robert Parker '21; Jalen Woodard '23. Recorder: Nancy Ratner, Director of Academic Projects.

Edward Melillo, chair of the Committee on Educational Policy (CEP), called the meeting to order at 11:00 a.m. via Zoom. The committee approved the minutes of February 10, 2021.

Change to the GPA Scale

Edward asked committee members if they wanted to recommend that the college assign a value of 4.3 points to A+ grades once the college adopts the new four-point scale. Krupa asked what impact this would have on honors calculations. Catherine said that while it would extend the band, as it does with the fourteen-point scale, she hoped faculty would continue to reserve A+ grades for the small number of students who have done truly outstanding work. Sandi noted that the A+ is already distinguished numerically from an A, so this would not change the calculation in any meaningful way. For Latin honors, the college already has to calculate the GPA to the third decimal place, so numerically, this would not make that much difference. She thought the college might need to rethink the role of grades in general in the awarding of honors at some point. Adam suggested Edward note in his letter to the Committee of Six that a shift to a new GPA may also retroactively affect the calculations of GPAs, and that the Committee might want to wrestle with that. Edward said he would include these points in his letter to the Committee of Six and say that the committee supported maintaining an A+ grade and applying a value of 4.3 points to the grade.

Calendar and Course Schedule

The committee next turned to a slightly revised 2021-22 Academic Calendar and a revised course schedule with expanded hours and additional flexibility to support labs that extend beyond the initial course blocks. Sandi expressed concern that the schedule leaves seven and one-half weeks after spring break. She thought this would create a very long stretch, followed by reading period and exams, for students. Catherine thought the spring break might be based on the calendar used by other institutions in the consortium, and some of these may still be in flux. Edward said he would ask Jesse Barba whether the break could be moved forward by one week. The committee then approved the revised calendar and course schedule.

Course proposals

Edward turned next to the course proposals and posed several questions to the committee. Should the CEP set criteria for enrollment caps, with a set number for seminars, another number for discussion classes, and so on. Nicola said she would not endorse setting a single set of rules, since there may be good reasons for setting a particular cap. Instead, she thought the CEP should engage in a campaign and offer tools for helping faculty think about how to teach to a particular class size. Krupa expressed concern that there may be inequality in the size of courses taught by tenured and untenured faculty. Sandi asked how these course caps will intersect with the expected increase in the number of students who will be on campus next year. Will there be sufficient capacity? Catherine said that, while some

courses will turn students away, many courses do not reach their caps. Students need to be open to greater exploration. She agreed with Nicola that the committee should not set hard limits. Instead, the committee should remind faculty members that the caps can stifle interest in their courses and reduce interest in their departments.

Edward next asked whether the committee thought the English department's course numbers should conform to the numbering system used by other departments. How much standardization should there be across the curriculum? Catherine explained that the English department has been discussing its idiosyncratic numbering system, which often leaves students confused about how to find entry into the department. Edward said he would reach out to the department and ask them whether the numbering system is on the path to change.

Adam noted that the English department website provides explanations about its numbering system. He thought there should be presumptive norms, but departures from the norms should be acceptable if a department had good pedagogical reasons for doing so. The committee should aim for neither excessive standardization nor excessive idiosyncrasy in these matters. As for enrollment caps, some faculty take on many more students than others. He thought it self-defeating for humanities faculty to complain about declining enrollments while capping their courses and suggested there be a message to the faculty to this effect.

Nicola suggested asking the English department about the huge variation in its course caps, and the seemingly incomprehensible rationale for many of the caps, with caps on seminars ranging from 12 students to 35. She also thought the course numbering system made no sense and needed a better rationale or explanation. Krupa agreed. She often cross-lists courses with English and often finds their capping system complicated. Cole said that the English department's course numbering system may be one reason he has not taken English classes yet. He also said that some students find low enrollment caps desirable. Edward said he would reach out to the department.

The committee then unanimously approved the 63 courses that had been submitted prior to the meeting.

Cluster hiring proposals

The committee next moved to the proposals for cluster hiring. The committee received three proposals for open-rank cluster hires. Edward asked the committee to discuss the merits of each proposal.

Chemistry and Physics/Astronomy

Chemistry and Physics/Astronomy jointly proposed hiring two STEM faculty for the Biochemistry and Biophysics (BCBP) program, with a focus on scientists whose interests also include the intersection between science and equity and social justice issues. If approved, one position would reside in Chemistry and one in Physics and Astronomy. The committee discussed the proposal.

Anthropology and Sociology

The Anthropology and Sociology department proposed hiring two or three faculty in the area of race, health, and the environment, possibly in partnership with American Studies, Black Studies, Environmental Studies, or Latinx and Latin American Studies. The committee discussed the proposal.

Law, Jurisprudence, and Social Thought (LJST)

LJST proposed two hires, possibly shared with either Computer Science or Philosophy. The area of specialty, race and American law, would focus in particular on issues related to technology, surveillance, and policing. The committee discussed the proposal.

The meeting adjourned at 12 noon.