

Committee on Educational Policy
February 3, 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 January 27, 2021.

Enrollment cap request

Edward asked the committee whether it wished to allow a late change to the enrollment cap for a course that will be taught in the spring semester but which was not subject to pre-registration. The committee was concerned this would mean turning more students away from this course. Edward asked the committee to send him any concerns and said he would contact the instructor.

External review

Edward asked the committee when it wished to meet with the external visiting committee for the Anthropology/Sociology department review. The committee opted to meet with the visiting committee at its usual time.

GPA scale

Edward next asked the committee to consider a question from the Workday Faculty Steering Committee, which is now addressing student services, including advising, registration, and the tracking of degree requirements. The steering committee proposed that the college adopt a four-point GPA scale to replace the current fourteen-point scale, noting that the four-point scale is used by the vast majority of educational institutions nationally. Amherst's unique approach may no longer serve students well because study away programs, fellowships, graduate schools, and the NCAA all require GPA information on the four-point scale.

The steering committee also noted that there currently is an inequity in rules about GPA conversions. The registrar provides varsity athletes with an official conversion to the four-point scale (required for participation in NCAA and NESCAC awards). Students applying for study away, fellowships, and certifications (e.g., teaching certification) have to convert their grades to a four-point scale on their own, which can be confusing and can unintentionally lead to a misrepresentation of their GPA. Alumni seeking licensure also struggle when state boards require GPAs to be presented on a four-point scale. Continued use of the fourteen-point system will require ongoing training to ensure that students and faculty members understand the scale and may also require the maintenance of two scales.

Edward thought the change to a four-point scale would be advantageous because it would eliminate inequities and put the college on an equal basis with other institutions. Adam asked whether all GPAs from the past would be recalculated. Catherine said they would. Cole asked whether there was no way to suppress the GPA and, if not, whether there was any way not to display the GPA with the full decimal

calculation. Catherine said Workday is configured by default to calculate students' GPA to the third decimal point, and that is what will appear on the transcript. Adam asked how this might affect grade compression and Latin honors. Cole thought it could affect grade compression if faculty adjust their grades out of a concern that students might react adversely to lower grades. He thought the presence of the four-point GPA would increase competition among students and would lead students to compare their grades to those of students from other institutions and to their own high school grades. He said he would prefer that the GPA not be displayed, but he recognized that is not an option.

Sandi noted that these questions emphasize the importance of considering whether and how to award Latin honors. If students' GPA is calculated to two decimals, students will become indistinguishable. She noted that the steering committee also asked whether the college should retain the A+ grade in the new system. This question highlighted the need to make a conscious decision about whether to maintain the higher grade.

Krupa said she liked the idea of simplifying things but would like to see the comparison between how fourteen points and four points would affect students. Adam agreed that it would not be good to increase the prominence of the GPA and said this inclines him to vote against the change because he did not want to make it easier for students to compare their grades. Catherine suggested inviting Jesse to the next meeting to address these questions. She noted that maintaining the fourteen-point scale would require the registrar to maintain two systems, which increases the workload and is problematic for that reason.

Target-of-opportunity (TO) request

Edward next asked the committee to discuss a request for a target-of-opportunity appointment.

FTE rankings

Edward asked the committee to begin discussing how to rank the requests.

FGO and pass/fail

The committee thought it needed more context for the data on this past semester's FGOs—including college-wide averages, changes in the number of students taking STEM courses over the past five to ten years, how many grades have been assigned over all, percentage of FGOs of all grades assigned in courses, etc. Nancy will ask Jesse for more data before the next meeting.

New business

Nicola asked whether next year's January courses will be taught on Zoom and who will decide the future of the program.

The meeting adjourned at 12:20 p.m.