

**Committee on Educational Policy  
February 5, 2020**

**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: Cole Graber-Mitchell '22; Sterling Kee '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. in Beneski, Room 311. The committee approved the minutes of January 29, 2020. The committee welcomed its newest member, Cole Graber-Mitchell '22, to the meeting.

**Study Abroad**

Edward reported that Janna Behrens has been working on the imbalance—not uncommon these days—that has resulted from more students studying abroad during one semester than the other. At Amherst, the preference among students has been to study away during the spring term, with 670 fewer enrollments this year during the spring semester, primarily in 300- and 400-level courses. This is a growing problem. In the fall of 2018, 32% of 300-level course attracted fewer than 10 enrollments. In the spring of 2019, this figure doubled, with 66% of 300-level seminars having fewer than 10 enrollments. An even more significant gap is anticipated in the 2020-2021 academic year to accommodate participation in the presidential election. To counter this trend, the Global Education Office has proposed moving to a single deadline of April 1, 2020, for study abroad for the 2020-2021 academic year and would urge the faculty to finalize courses for the upcoming year in the spring prior to pre-registration to help students plan their leave more thoughtfully. The enrollment management committee supports this change and the institution of a soft cap for each semester. Janna asked that the committee discuss this proposal and if it accepts this goal, Janna will move quickly to advertise this change on her website.

Tekla expressed dismay that the faculty would have to finalize their teaching schedules for the coming year so early in the spring semester. The scheduling of classes is still being discussed in many departments. She expressed particular concern about the extent to which study abroad was becoming “the tail wagging the dog” of the Amherst education. Catherine countered that Amherst is unusual in not providing the schedule a year in advance. Students have long advocated for this information to help them plan their schedules. Tekla allowed that this may be helpful for advising purposes and said she would be satisfied if the website clearly states that this may not be the final schedule. She was not supportive of making this change solely to help students who wish to study abroad.

Catherine noted that the imbalance has risen to over 100 students and is impacting the college in multiple ways, including upper-level class enrollments, the Valentine dining schedule, housing for the fall semester, and the number of transfer students who can be accommodated. Tekla said she thought the college has been pushing study abroad as something critical to a college education; she took issue with this aspect, in particular. Catherine argued that only 45% of Amherst students study abroad. Tekla said she wished 45% of students were taking courses in the arts, in the sciences, in other languages, etc. Too many students waste time and effort while studying abroad. The college could correct this by not urging students to think they need to study away. While doing so may be beneficial to many students, if it is done in a thoughtful manner, too many others put too little thought into the decision to study abroad. Catherine pointed out that Amherst has some of the lowest rates among its peers.

Edward, noting that there was no easy agreement about this as a solution, suggested the committee continue this conversation at another meeting. Catherine said she will convey to Janna that the committee has not accepted the offered solution. Tekla urged the college to think about not outsourcing study abroad and instead develop some really attractive fall programs.

### **Independent Scholars**

Edward next mentioned that he had been contacted by the registrar's office about a student who had been mistakenly categorized as an independent scholar. The student would more appropriately be classified as an interdisciplinary scholar. Edward thought the difference between an independent scholar and an interdisciplinary major was not clear from the language on the website and suggested it be clarified. Catherine noted that independent scholars do not take any classes on campus; they work independently, often at sites that are off-campus. That needs to be included in the language. Edward said Karu will assemble a meeting with the class deans, and he will join that meeting to discuss how to amend the language.

### **Add-drop challenge**

Sterling noted that many courses are offered during overlapping time slots. This makes it exceedingly difficult to shop classes that are offered during the most heavily used time slots. And, he noted, if students do not attend a class, they now risk losing their seats. After speaking with a professor about the problem, he asked whether faculty might be willing to teach their courses during the first week of add-drop as two half-classes. This would allow students to sample overlapping classes.

Krupa suggested instead that students inform the professor that they will leave early so they can attend a second class; she assured Sterling that faculty would not take offense. Sterling said students are worried about protecting their space in the class. Tekla said she was skeptical that students could assess the appropriateness of a course on the basis of half a class meeting; most students would need to experience several class meetings. She also said (and other faculty at the meeting agreed) that she would be reluctant to give up the material that would have been covered during a whole class meeting. She noted that the problem only applies to overlapping courses and hoped students would not judge a class based on just thirty minutes.

Edward agreed. He suggested the students start by approaching the professor, as suggested by Krupa. He also noted that his department has tried to schedule more courses across more class slots to avoid this problem. Sterling asked for assurance that faculty would not drop students on this basis. The faculty members thought it unlikely that a student would be dropped if the student first approached the professor about the plan to leave after the first half of the first class. Christian too did not think the problem warranted such a radical solution. Tekla also suggested talking to the professor about the course outside of class. Sterling thanked the committee for considering his suggestion.

### **FTE requests**

Edward asked the committee next to discuss the three remaining FTE requests.

### *Chemistry*

The Chemistry department has requested an expansion position in organic chemistry. This would allow the department to offer the organic chemistry course during both the fall and the spring semesters, address its extremely large enrollments, and enhance its support for students who arrive with different levels of preparation.

*Asian Languages and Civilizations and History (South Asian History)*

The Departments of Asian Languages and Civilizations (ASLC) and History have requested a replacement position in South Asian history, following a tenure denial.

*History and Sexuality, Gender, and Women's Studies*

The committee next turned to a request from the Departments of History and Sexuality, Gender, and Women's Studies (SWAGS) for a shared expansion position in Asian American history with a focus on women, gender, and sexuality, with the time period open. This is one of two requests from both departments this year, and neither department prioritized this request.

Tekla noted that the committee would return to all five requests at its next meeting and attempt to find consensus about its recommendations to the administration. She noted that the committee could allocate as many as five FTEs, but does not have to recommend all of them. After receiving the recommendations from the committee, the provost and president will make the final decision.

The meeting adjourned at 12:15 p.m.