

Committee on Educational Policy

February 9, 2023

In attendance: Faculty: Robert Benedetto, Chair; David Hanneke; Mekhola Gomes; Chris Kingston; Geoffrey Sanborn. Provost and Dean of the Faculty: Catherine Epstein, ex officio. Students: Isaiah Doble '25; Zane Khiry '25; Gent Malushaga '25. Recorder: Nancy Ratner, Director of Academic Projects.

Rob Benedetto, chair, called the meeting to order at 2:30 p.m. in Porter Lounge, Converse approved the minutes from the previous meeting.

Proposed revision to the *Faculty Handbook*

Rob asked the committee to review the proposed revision to the *Faculty Handbook* which would explicitly state that faculty are expected to teach every class, compensating for any missed classes in a meaningful way:

Faculty are expected to hold all scheduled classes. If faculty members are unable to teach class in person, they may reschedule the class, teach remotely, or communicate material asynchronously (for example, via recorded lectures) for no more than the equivalent of two weeks of classes during the semester. Alternatively, they may arrange for a colleague to teach in their place. In the event that faculty need to teach more than the equivalent of two weeks remotely, they should be in touch with the chair of their department to make other arrangements for the teaching of their classes.

The committee approved this version, and Rob said he would forward this to the FEC, with a recommendation that this be added to the *Faculty Handbook*.

Board of Trustees

The committee next discussed the upcoming meeting with the Board of Trustees. Catherine said she will provide the board with data about the significant increase in STEM majors and corresponding decrease in humanities majors, as well as data about class sizes before the board meets with the CEP. She said the board wants to hear the concerns of the faculty, particularly as those concerns affect the curriculum and suggested the committee think about what it wished to share.

Rob said he planned to focus his remarks on the changes to Latin honors, followed by the challenges surrounding STEM enrollments and the balancing of demand across academic divisions. Chris suggested also sharing faculty concerns about classroom and office space. Catherine said the trustees would be interested in hearing about all of these genuine problems. Geoff said he thought it was also important to let the trustees know that Amherst's humanities

enrollments remain stronger than those of other colleges, and that to remain strong they will need continued resources. Catherine said English enrollments remain high at Amherst, as do language enrollments, but we are not prepared to talk about the experiences of other schools.

The committee asked students if they had any particular curricular issues they wanted to bring to the trustees. Zane said the scheduling of courses—with too many classes offered at the most congested times, reducing students' options—remains a major concern for students. He also asked about the status of Asian American studies. Catherine mentioned that the College has hired two faculty members in Asian American studies this year as a result of last year's FTE decisions and will search again next year for a third position. The faculty will decide ultimately on whether to establish a major.

Gent said students are interested in having a January term again. Catherine shared that the Committee on Student Learning has been thinking about a different use of a J-term, structuring the final week in January as a time when it would bring sophomores together for a structured program of activities. Isaiah said addressing the sophomore year is also a big theme for students who serve as advisors to the Center for Teaching and Learning.

Geoff said he thought departments need to understand that FTEs are awarded based on need and that replacements are not always guaranteed. The committee then briefly discussed other issues that affect department enrollments, including the limiting effect of enrollment caps; the stated preference for majors in many humanities courses; the lack of introductory level courses; and the deployment of faculty across course levels.

Mekhola noted that Amherst's small classes in the humanities which allow discussion of topics that cannot be discussed in other places situate Amherst at the forefront of defending academic freedom. She said Amherst must support the humanities and classes that allow this.

Course proposal review

Following the previous conversation, Nancy offered to provide a spreadsheet with all courses, indicating their levels, enrollment caps, and priorities for enrollment by department. David said he would also like to see the student-to-faculty ratios for each department and data on the student experience, as was provided a few years ago. This information would allow the committee to set some goals for departments. Geoff suggested providing guidance for an appropriate ratio of 100- to 400-level courses. Catherine thought that departments might plan for each faculty member to teach a minimum of three 100- and 200-level courses, and at most one 300- or 400-level course. This would rebalance the offerings in ways that would help students. The committee decided to begin approving the 120 courses that it has received at its next meeting.

FTE review

Mathematics and Statistics

The Department of Mathematics and Statistics has requested three new open-rank FTEs in mathematics, and also indicated that it may wish to have approval to hire additional positions to replace any further tenure-line math faculty who might leave their roles this year. The committee discussed the request.

Theater and Dance

The Department of Theater and Dance has requested an FTE in dance to replace Professor Woodson who will retire in three years. The committee considered the request.

The meeting adjourned at 4:00 p.m.