

**Committee on Educational Policy**  
**January 29, 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*. 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 December 11 and December 18, 2020.

**FTE requests**

Edward noted that the committee has received requests for five FTEs—two requested as shared positions—from five departments. Three of the requests are for replacement positions and two are for expansion positions. The committee agreed that members whose departments had submitted a request would leave the room during the discussion and that requests would be taken up in a random order.

*Art and History of Art*

Edward asked the committee to begin with the request from the Department of Art and History of Art. The department would like to hire a studio artist to teach sculpture as a replacement for its current sculptor, Carol Keller, who will enter her final year of phased retirement in the next academic year. The department noted that it would also encourage the new hire to contribute courses to the Five College Advanced Studio Seminar, the First-year Seminar, and the Arts at Amherst programs.

*Sexuality, Women's and Gender Studies*

The Sexuality, Women's and Gender Studies (SWAGS) department has requested two FTEs. Edward asked the committee to begin with the department's priority request, which would replace Sahar Sadjadi, who resigned in 2018, with an open rank search in the area of Gender, Science, and Technology. The department has proposed a broad search which would include any discipline in the social or natural sciences. The department proposed an open rank search to support mentorship responsibilities.

**Intensive-Writing Program**

Edward next asked the committee to return to its discussion of the intensive-writing program. Catherine reported that the college will offer a few intensive-writing classes next year—one taught by Ben Lieber, and several others taught by faculty members who participated in a workshop around intensive writing last spring. Austin Sarat will teach an intensive-writing course this spring. This still leaves a big gap. Tekla asked about the original departments that had received FTEs in exchange for a commitment to mount one intensive-writing course each year. None of these departments has committed to teaching a course this year. Edward said he will reach out to the current chairs of the departments—Alex George, Jason Robinson, Becky Sinos—to learn their intentions.

Adam said he was not optimistic about this program. Teaching intensive-writing to students is a high priority for the college, and it has been compromised by the lack of continuity of staffing. He thought it was time to launch an ambitious lecturer program. The Pioneer Valley is populated with many skilled writers—some quite prestigious—who could join Amherst faculty in team-taught courses. Intensive-writing courses require scaling way-back on content and also require particular training. Through such a partnership, students could learn from a professor skilled in an area and a writer skilled in composition. Catherine pointed out that this would be a very expensive model, using both a faculty slot and also

requiring an expensive visitor. She was more interested in hiring a lecturer who would have a home in a department and who would teach writing and content. She said that she thought it was important that such a lecturer have expertise in a discipline that is taught at Amherst, as well as training in teaching intensive-writing courses.

Tekla suggested asking each department that committed to staffing an intensive-writing course to contribute a first-year seminar (FYS) instead. Then she thought the administration should turn to the FYS faculty who are well-positioned to teach one of these intensive-writing courses and ask which of them might wish to make a five-year commitment to teaching in the program.

Krupa said she was more interested in hiring faculty who would teach writing. Catherine said she now thinks it might be best to hire lecturers trained in a discipline who have an interest in teaching writing. Both Krupa and Tekla said such people exist and mentioned several examples. Catherine then pointed to the model of lecturers in mathematics. Ideally, Catherine said she would like to hire a writing counterpart to the math lecturer—someone with a PhD who has a real interest in teaching writing to students who lack the writing skills that are necessary to succeed at Amherst. The position would be dedicated to teaching the courses in the intensive-writing program.

Tekla said she remained troubled that the faculty has not chosen to do this—that they lack the skills and the commitment to take this on. Catherine said she thought intensive-writing is a particular thing and requires someone with skills and interest and reach; this might be better if it is not tenure-line faculty. Tekla admitted that she was willing to stop resisting. She suggested the dean advertise in general for a writer-lecturer, with a PhD in a discipline, and then approach the relevant department once someone suitable has been identified. She was convinced that departments would happily accommodate such an individual. Adam suggested flipping the order. He suggested that Provost/Dean solicit proposals from departments who wished to hire talented writers into prestigious, named or endowed, longer-term lectureships. The CEP could then select from among the proposals the departments who make the most imaginative and best overall argument. To allay concerns that departments might, over time, come to burden lecturers with excess labor and unwanted tasks, the advertised position could contain very definite limits that would make duties clear to lecturers and departments alike. He remained convinced that hiring talented local writers would be worth the cost, especially if the college wished to preserve its cherished reputation as a premier writing college. Nancy suggested that highly skilled writers are not necessarily the best people to teach writing; for many the skill comes so naturally that they are not aware of what is required or how one would overcome struggles with writing. Adam agreed, and suggested that departments would need to hire with care.

Catherine asked why Adam thought it would be necessary to co-teach with someone else. Adam said a faculty member would address the issue of how to present content and that the lecturer would couple that with teachings about form. Adam said he could imagine a humanistic equivalent of a lab course, where a course that focused on content two or three times a week could be coupled with an additional section or sections focused exclusively on writing. This, he argued, might circumvent the need to decrease the teaching of content in courses that focus on writing skills. Tekla said the college would have to make sure that the department where this individual would be housed understands that the course is not about conveying content, but rather about writing within a discipline, and that the individual would not be teaching courses for the department. Edward suggested the provost provide a fund that would allow the instructor to bring good writers who could then talk about how they manage writing struggles. The committee agreed that the provost could advertise for a lecturer with a PhD in an unspecified field who had expertise in writing pedagogy.

Adam proposed that the CEP try to think of writing skills outside of the late nineteenth century trinity of majors, departments, and disciplines. Perhaps, he suggested, the task of writing instruction today should be to couple rigorous disciplinary training with the ability to translate the teachings and conclusions of disciplines in non-disciplinary terms. Perhaps translational writing—that is, how to render one’s expertise so it would be accessible to a non-specialist public, with good science writing as the model—should be the focus of writing instruction at the college. Catherine said that would be more on the order of the imagined Calderwood seminar—designed to teach juniors and seniors how to write about their disciplines in ways that are accessible to the public. She thought this addressed a different issue. She would want to search for an instructor who is grounded in a discipline who has interest in teaching first- and second-year students who need to work on college-level writing. Tekla added that this is not instruction in remedial writing; rather, it is about how to make an argument and present an idea in a cogent way. Catherine said she will think about the idea of hiring a lecture and discuss this with others.

Adam then asked what had happened to the proposal for a Sophomore Seminar. Catherine said a group of faculty have been working on the development of such a course.

The meeting adjourned at 12:15 p.m.