

Committee on Educational Policy
January 30, 2019

In attendance: Faculty: Catherine Sanderson, chair; Lawrence Douglas; Tekla Harms; Tariq Jaffer; Edward Melillo (by phone). Students: Brooke Harrington '22; Julia Ralph '21. Catherine Epstein, Dean, ex officio. Recorder: Nancy Ratner, Director of Academic Projects.

Catherine Sanderson, chair of the Committee on Educational Policy (CEP), called the meeting to order 8:45 a.m. in the Mullins Room. The committee approved the minutes from the meetings of December 12th, 17th, and 21st.

Tekla reported that she has experienced a new problem with drop/add and asked whether the advisor has to give permission to allow a student to add or drop a course. Catherine S. said she will make inquiries.

Criteria for Target of Opportunity (TO) Hires

The committee asked about the criteria for requesting and receiving permission to make a target-of opportunity (TO) hire. Lawrence inquired, in particular, about the phrase “demographic diversity” and asked what exactly this was intended to mean. Did it refer to historically underrepresented minorities? Catherine E. volunteered that the candidate should bring a background that is not well represented on campus. Ted asked whether disabled candidates would qualify. Catherine E. said that candidates with disabilities have not been proposed but could certainly be discussed. Tekla asked whether each TO would take the place of one of the seven FTEs, placing pressure on other requests. Catherine E. said the college has some flexibility for hiring in this area and would not count these against the seven. Tariq then inquired whether the TO referred to the candidate or to the position. Catherine E. thought it had been used to refer to both candidates and positions in some earlier requests, but she was not familiar with the arguments that were made at that time.

Tekla noted that the idea behind the TO program, which was originally proposed by the Committee on Academic Priorities (CAP), was that if departments identified particularly strong diverse candidates during a search, they could then ask for permission to hire both the top-ranked candidate and a second highly-ranked candidate who would bring diversity to the college. The CAP had proposed that there be a pool of two FTEs from which these could be allocated and recommended that departments be required to mortgage an FTE to obtain one of the two positions. The assumption at that time was that the college would not hire beyond those two FTEs until the mortgaged FTEs had been returned to the pool.

This limit is no longer in place; 6.5 FTEs are still mortgaged to future retirements. However, the TOs have allowed the college to hire 20 new faculty members, including seven African Americans, three Asian Americans, four Latinx, and two Native Americans. Committee members noted that the Math and Statistics department has been a frequent user of the TO program and has mortgaged many of its faculty FTEs to these. Catherine E. said the Math and Statistics department has been in perpetual search mode, and the department tends to search broadly, hence its many TO requests.

Lawrence said he was worried that TO searches might be focused more on assembling numbers than on building community. Tekla countered that every inroad made by the college to diversify its faculty leads to a better faculty. She pointed out that when she was hired, the college did so in part in an effort to diversify the gender of its faculty; as a result, women faculty in STEM areas are no longer a rarity on campus. She contended that every step forward helps to diversify the faculty, and, while cautioning

against hiring unqualified people, she urged her colleagues not to sweat the other details. What was needed was good judgment, not more rules. Lawrence wanted criteria and said he worried that arbitrary distinctions leading to more TO hires would have the unintended effect of discriminating against other deserving candidates.

Tariq suggested the CEP return to the document and clarify what is meant by demographic diversity. Catherine E. worried that doing so would discriminate against immigrant faculty. Tekla suggested replacing “demographic diversity” with “a faculty that reflects the diversity of the student body.” Lawrence thought it would be a mistake to institute a demographic mirror. Catherine S. asked the committee what additional information it needed. Lawrence wanted a clear definition of what qualifies an individual as Latinx. Catherine E. said the faculty need to think about who should count in this category; she thought the definition would need to be broad for legal purposes and would ultimately come down to judgment. Tekla added that there is substantial fluidity in peoples’ movement between Latin America, Caribbean, and the US, perhaps making any definition unrealistic, and Tariq agreed that identity can be a complex notion.

Request for a TO hire from Math/Statistics

Catherine S. then asked the committee to review a TO request.

FGO proposal

Catherine E. asked the committee to reconsider one aspect of the FGO proposal that it sent to the Committee of Six. As constituted, a student would have to declare a course as an FGO during add/drop. This proposal addresses one way to encourage greater exploration of the curriculum, but it does not address the needs of a student who develops unanticipated problems later in the semester. Tekla suggested adding a line that would allow the following: “In exceptional circumstances, a student may, with the permission of the student’s instructor, academic advisor, and class dean, convert a course to FGO after the end of add/drop.” All agreed to this addition.

FTE requests

Black Studies

The Black Studies department has requested an FTE in the social sciences, with expertise in qualitative research methodologies, as a replacement for the position held by Professor Ferguson.

Psychology

The Psychology department had a previously approved FTE for a person who specialized in the area of diversity, as a way to staff its newly adopted curriculum.

Environmental Studies

The Environmental Studies department has requested two new positions, an environmental humanities position with a focus on writing and communications, and a scientist, specializing in the human dimensions of climate change.

The meeting adjourned at 9:50 a.m.