

**Committee on Educational Policy**  
**March 27, 2019**

**In attendance: Faculty: Catherine Sanderson, chair; Lawrence Douglas; Tariq Jaffer; Edward Melillo. Students: Gabriel Echarte '22; Brooke Harrington '22; Julia Ralph '21. Recorder: Nancy Ratner, Director of Academic Projects.**

Catherine Sanderson, chair of the Committee on Educational Policy (CEP), called the meeting to order at 8:30 a.m. in the Mullins Room. The committee approved the minutes from the meeting of March 20, 2019.

**Course proposals**

Catherine S. next asked the committee to discuss some additional course proposals. The committee approved new courses and asked for two course descriptions to be reduced in length and jargon.

**Board Meeting**

The committee briefly discussed issues that might be of interest to the Board, including the number of course proposals reviewed, the review of FTE and target-of-opportunity requests, and policy changes that the CEP has discussed this year, many of them originating with the Ad Hoc Curriculum Committee, including changes to pass/fail, advising, learning goals, the awarding of credit for half courses, and reductions in the number of visiting faculty.

**Military Activation Policy**

Catherine S. next asked the committee to return to the Military Activation Policy, which the committee had discussed at its previous meeting. Nancy said she had shared the committee's concerns and questions with Justin Smith, the college lawyer. He explained that a number of points in the policy are already required of any college (including Amherst) that receives federal student aid. The general idea behind the applicable law and regulations is that military students should not be punished for their military obligations.

With that in mind, the college's obligation in the case of a student whose major is no longer offered is to find a way to put that student as close to a degree or certificate as they would have been had they not left for military service. This could create some difficulties if there is no relationship between the student's coursework and new major, but hopefully that would be a very rare exception. Justin thought perhaps in such a rare instance it would be possible to honor the old major, but he said he would welcome the CEP's input on how the college might be able to best meet this legal obligation.

Regarding the CEP's second question—as to who would determine whether reasonable efforts were available to help a student whose academic preparation left the student incapable of managing the work—he thought it likely that it would be the class dean who would make such a determination in consultation with the student's academic advisor and/or the chair of the department (of the student's major). He agreed with the CEP that the policy should more formally designate this authority and thought there would be some flexibility on this point. It was his expectation/hope that it would be a rare instance that the college would determine that, despite efforts to help a student prepare for re-enrollment, a student would remain academically unready to return.

The committee was satisfied with his explanations and approved revising the policy to specify that the class dean, in consultation with the student's academic advisor and/or the chair of the department of the student's major would make the determination about a student's readiness to return.

If the student previously declared a major ~~or was pursuing a certificate program~~ at the time of ~~their~~ military service leave and that major ~~or certificate program~~ is no longer offered at the time of the student's re-enrollment, the **class dean, in consultation with the student's academic advisor and/or the chair of the department, would determine** ~~student will receive credit toward the major or certificate program that the College determines~~ is most similar **and determine the amount of credit to be awarded toward that major.** ~~to the major or certificate program.~~

### **Flexible Grading Option (FGO)**

Catherine S. said Nick Horton had asked the committee to return one more time to the FGO recommendation and clarify how the policy would apply to second semester seniors. He was particularly interested in a clearer sense of the options available to students who encounter exceptional circumstances during their final semester.

The committee noted that the intention was twofold: the FGO would replace the current pass/fail policy with a flexible grading option; and it would allow students to register for up to four courses—no more than one per semester—to be taken under the FGO. Because the FGO, unlike the traditional pass/fail option, allows students the flexibility to decide whether or not to accept the grade five days after the grade is assigned, this option would not be available to second semester seniors, due to the short window for calculating honors degrees; instead, seniors would retain an option to declare a course pass/fail before the end of add/drop if they have not already exhausted their FGO options.

In addition, the CEP noted that there may be exceptional circumstances—the death of a family member, serious illness, etc.—when the college would want to allow more flexibility. In such cases, students who have the permission of the course instructor, their academic advisor, and their class dean, would be allowed to convert one course to pass/fail after the end of add/drop.

The committee thought these two options should be presented as separate motions. In the first motion, the faculty would be asked whether it wishes to substitute the FGO for the traditional pass/fail and whether it wishes to expand the number of courses that may be taken this way to four courses. Under this motion, second semester seniors would retain the ability to substitute pass/fail for the FGO if they haven't exhausted their FGO options:

#### **MOTION 1:**

**Components of the proposed system: Student declares FGO during add-drop and has five days after receiving the grade to decide whether to accept it or convert to a pass. Second semester seniors cannot participate in this. Instructors are not informed as to which, if any, students are taking a course under the FGO option. Unrecorded FGO grades are kept by the Registrar until the start of the second semester of a student's senior year. This enables recovery of previously unrecorded grades via petition to a student's class dean and the registrar, should this become necessary as a consequence of changing majors or changing post-graduate plans.**

**CATALOG LANGUAGE:  
FLEXIBLE GRADE ~~PASS-FAIL~~ OPTION (FGO)**

THE PURPOSE OF THE FLEXIBLE GRADE OPTION (FGO) IS TO ENCOURAGE STUDENTS TO EXPLORE THE BREADTH OF AMHERST'S OPEN CURRICULUM AS THEY SEEK TO MEET THE COLLEGE'S STATED LEARNING GOALS. Amherst College students WHO ENTER AS FIRST-YEARS may choose, with the permission of the instructor, a pass/fail arrangement in two ELECT TO TAKE UP TO FOUR of the ~~32~~ TOTAL NUMBER OF courses required for the degree UNDER THE FGO; TRANSFER STUDENTS WHO ENTER AS SOPHOMORES MAY ELECT TO TAKE UP TO THREE COURSES REQUIRED FOR THE DEGREE UNDER THE FGO; AND TRANSFER STUDENTS WHO ENTER AS JUNIORS MAY ELECT TO TAKE UP TO TWO COURSES REQUIRED FOR THE DEGREE UNDER THE FGO, but STUDENTS MAY not take more than one SUCH course in any one semester. COURSES TAKEN IN THE SECOND SEMESTER OF THE SENIOR YEAR ARE NOT ELIGIBLE FOR THE FGO. TO ELECT A COURSE AS FGO, STUDENTS MUST FILE THE FGO FORM, SIGNED BY THEIR ADVISOR(S), WITH THE OFFICE OF THE REGISTRAR BY THE END OF THE ADD-DROP PERIOD. INSTRUCTOR PERMISSION IS NOT REQUIRED ON THE FGO FORM, AND INSTRUCTORS ARE NOT INFORMED IF STUDENTS HAVE ELECTED THE FGO OPTION FOR THEIR COURSE.

STUDENTS WILL HAVE FIVE DAYS AFTER THE DATE GRADES ARE DUE TO EITHER ACCEPT THE GRADE ASSIGNED BY THE INSTRUCTOR, OR IN THE CASE OF PASSING GRADES ("D" OR BETTER), ELECT TO HAVE A PASS ("P") DISPLAYED ON THEIR TRANSCRIPT FOR THE COURSE. (NO GRADE POINT EQUIVALENT WILL BE ASSIGNED TO A "PASS.") IF THE LETTER GRADE ASSIGNED BY THE INSTRUCTOR IS AN "F," AN "F" WILL BE RECORDED. IF THE STUDENT TAKES NO ACTION, THE ASSIGNED GRADE WILL REMAIN ON THE TRANSCRIPT. ~~The choice of a pass/fail alternative must be made by the last day of add/drop at the beginning of the semester and must have the approval of the student's instructor and all major advisors. No grade-point equivalent will be assigned to a "Pass," but courses taken on this basis will receive either a "P" or an "F" from the instructor, although in the regular evaluation of work done during the semester the instructor may choose to assign the usual grades for work submitted by students exercising this option.~~ SECOND SEMESTER SENIORS WHO HAVE NOT EXHAUSTED THEIR FGO OPTIONS MAY SELECT ONE COURSE TO BE TAKEN PASS/FAIL. TO DO THIS, SENIORS SUBMIT A PASS/FAIL FORM, SIGNED BY THEIR ADVISOR(S) AND THE COURSE INSTRUCTOR, TO THE REGISTRAR BY THE END OF THE ADD-DROP PERIOD. (NO GRADE POINT EQUIVALENT WILL BE ASSIGNED TO A "PASS.")

A second motion would ask whether faculty wish to allow students who are encountering exceptional circumstances—serious illness, family emergencies, etc.—to convert a course to FGO—or in the case of second semester seniors, to pass/fail—at any point in the semester. This conversion would require the permission of the instructor, the student's advisor, and the class dean and could, if thought necessary, exceed the four permitted FGOs.

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. SECOND SEMESTER SENIORS MAY, IN EXCEPTIONAL CIRCUMSTANCES, WITH THE PERMISSION OF THE STUDENT'S INSTRUCTOR, ACADEMIC ADVISOR, AND CLASS DEAN, CONVERT A COURSE TO PASS/FAIL AFTER THE END OF ADD/DROP.

The committee asked to review these two motions at its next meeting.

### Advising Recommendations

Catherine S. then asked the committee to return to the advising recommendations of the Ad Hoc Curriculum Committee. One recommendation would require all faculty members with fewer than 18 advisees to participate in the college advising program, including orientation advising. CEP faculty thought it an unreasonable expectation that faculty be present before the official beginning of the semester. Catherine S. said the committee would return to this discussion at its next meeting.

The meeting adjourned at 9:50 a.m.