

Committee on Educational Policy (CEP)

March 11, 2016

In attendance: Faculty: David S. Hall, chair; Alexander George; Klára Móricz; Sean Redding; Catherine Sanderson. Catherine Epstein, dean. Students: Samuel Keaser '16, Rashid (Chico) Kosber '17; Steven Ryu '16. Recorder: Nancy Ratner, Associate Dean of Admission and Researcher for Academic Projects.

David Hall, Chair of the Committee on Educational Policy (CEP), called to order the CEP meeting at 8:30 a.m. in the Kennick Room in Cooper House, and the committee approved the minutes from the meeting of March 4, 2016.

Amherst College Statement of Intellectual Freedom

David welcomed Lawrence Douglas, the author of the draft statement of intellectual freedom and a member of the Committee of Six. Lawrence explained that this statement, if approved, would be posted on the college web site and appear in the Student Handbook and also the Faculty Handbook. Reviewing the history of this process, he said it began with a suggestion from Trent Maxey, who had read the University of Chicago statement, noticed that Amherst lacked a statement of this sort, and wrote to the Committee of Six asking that Amherst consider a statement based on the University of Chicago statement. The CEP, after reviewing the University of Chicago statement last spring, had raised a number of concerns and concluded that the college should develop its own statement. The committee also expressed concern at that time that statements from individual departments might be interpreted as curtailing academic freedom, hence the need for a clear statement. Lawrence said the Committee of Six believes the new draft provides a robust defense of existing practice in an Amherst statement of intellectual freedom.

David noted that the statement from the University of Chicago directly addresses “concerns about civility and mutual respect” and says these “can never be used as a justification for closing off discussion of ideas, however offensive or disagreeable those ideas may be to some members of our community.” He thought the Amherst version addressed the role of the College in this regard, but did not directly address how the members of the community should conduct themselves. Lawrence directed his attention to the second paragraph, which addresses the responsibilities of different constituencies to foster a climate of mutual respect, stating that “the response to disagreeable ideas must not contravene the norms of academic freedom that enable the College to thrive as a space of liberal inquiry.” He noted that staff cannot have the same expressive freedoms as faculty (except when those staff are serving directly in an instructional or research role). Workplace norms preserve a decent amount of restriction. Alex asked whether those freedoms would be extended to a professor who makes a statement outside the direct area of his or her expertise. Lawrence said they would be protected under this statement, up to a point.

Sean recalled that this issue had been raised when trigger warnings were discussed last year. Where would they fit into this statement? Lawrence said the statement makes clear to junior faculty that there cannot be a punitive response if a person has not placed a trigger warning on a course. Klára asked about the restriction on “speech that directly interferes with a core function of the college.” Lawrence

explained that this part of the statement would, for example, prevent students from organizing a boycott of a professor's class or from occupying the president's office in a way that would prevent the regular business of the campus.

Alex suggested modifying the "reasonable limitations on the time, place, and manner of expression" to say, "It may also place reasonable limitations on the time, place, and manner of expression if it might disrupt the ordinary functioning of the college." This would clarify the intent. Lawrence thought the sentence already had clear legal meaning. Alex said it might be helpful to include the additional clause for non-lawyers.

Chico noted that during the Amherst Uprising students had occupied the library. Could this statement have been used to prevent the occupation? Catherine E. noted that the students had not interfered with people using the library, so no core function had been prevented. Lawrence agreed with her. If students had prevented students from entering the library for other purposes, it would have applied. David pointed out that the library usually is closed overnight, and thus it was not operating normally - would ending the protest by ejecting the protesters have constituted a reasonable limitation on time, place, and manner of expression? Sean asked who would decide when the lines had been crossed. Lawrence said the default position would be an overriding commitment to open, robust inquiry. He also noted that the statement has been vetted by a prominent constitutionalist at Yale Law School.

Klára said she thought it was a good idea to have this statement of core values. Catherine E. added that it will also provide a good resource for faculty to turn to when inviting people with controversial views to campus. Sam supported Alex's suggestion to add a modifying clause. He was concerned that Amherst's paternalistic attitude towards students could lead it to place a limit on time as an excuse for ending a protest. David thanked Lawrence, and said the committee will return to this statement and provide the Committee of Six with its opinion. Lawrence said the Committee of Six would like to send this to the faculty this semester, if possible. He departed at 9:00 a.m.

FTEs recommendations

Catherine E. informed the committee that there could be as many as 12 FTEs approved this spring, due to resignations and retirements. David asked the committee to turn to its final discussion of which FTEs and how many FTEs should be allocated.

Announcements

David said he had attended the College Council meeting at which the college calendar was discussed. Catherine E. added that there will be a new proposal this spring, with the hope of having the faculty vote a new spring calendar before the end of the semester.

Course proposals

Catherine E. explained that faculty teaching Mellon tutorials can receive a stipend if they teach the tutorial as an overload; alternatively, the department can choose to have a visitor. This was arranged in this way because a previous CEP had objected to allowing such small classes. Sean wondered whether

departments were aware of these arrangements. David asked who made the decision of stipend as opposed to course replacement. Catherine E. answered that this was decided mutually between the department and the individual faculty member. Klára expressed concern about the criteria for students getting into these classes. Catherine E. said that was left to the instructor. The committee asked that there be no "instructor permission" permitted for these courses.

Catherine E. was also concerned about the prevalence of requiring instructor permission for courses in theater and dance. David said the department is concerned that students lacking the social capital to approach a faculty member might shy away from their courses. He emphasized that faculty cannot cut their enrollments shy of the cap without instructor permission. Sean asked how many instructor permission courses were now on the books. Klára thought faculty should state in their course description their eagerness to work with all interested students. Sean thought faculty advisors would probably need to encourage students during advising to seek permission, and Catherine S. agreed. David suggested the dean circulate a flyer to advisors asking them to encourage students to approach instructors about these kinds of courses, especially during orientation advising.

Returning to the Mellon tutorials, David said he was concerned by the piecework angle of the Mellon tutorials. Science faculty members frequently have students working in their laboratories but do so without additional pay. Catherine E. said this had initially been seen as a way to replicate in the humanities what science faculty do in their laboratories. She would prefer not to give stipends for teaching these courses, but rather to offer departments concerned about providing enough courses a "course borrow." David cautioned that extending some version of this to science faculty could have repercussions for science instruction, in which small research courses might proliferate if the "course" were essentially being taught anyway as part of faculty members' research programs. This issue had arisen at Mt. Holyoke. Catherine S was concerned that, while a few students benefit greatly from these opportunities, many more students end up in courses taught by visitors as a result. She noted that in her field these constitute special topics courses, taught as an overload.

Catherine S. then said she was surprised by the number of lecturers and visiting lecturers. Catherine E. said lecturers tend to be discipline specific to some extent. Studio arts courses are taught by resident artists and lecturers teach language classes up to the 200-level (and Arabic up to the 400-level), introductory math and statistics courses, and the lab component of some introductory science courses. These positions were created as a way to circumvent the FTE cap and to allow departments to meet important needs. There are about 15 "course borrows" per semester, and currently there are 16 visiting faculty members with contracts of more than one year. The appearance of a large number in this group may be an artifact of the timing. Visitors have just been hired; faculty courses, submitted by the deadline, were approved in the first round. Catherine S. said the visitors are problematic for students when they need letters of reference. Often they can no longer locate the individual.

Turning to specific courses, the committee asked that the poetry courses accommodate 15 students, rather than 12. The committee also objected to a 12-person first-year seminar, which was to be held in the Emily Dickinson Museum, since that number would complicate the number of instructors needed and the composition of squads. The committee also asked that information about grading be removed

from the seminar description for a first-year seminar. The rest of the courses were approved, pending faculty approval.

Ideas for meeting with Trustees

David said he planned to summarize what the committee has done this year, including the issues around the transcript and issues behind the changes to pre-registration, particularly focusing on the significance of faculty giving up some autonomy in these matters. He encouraged the committee to submit additional suggestions to him.

The meeting adjourned at 9:50 a.m.