

**Committee on Educational Policy**  
**March 24, 2021**

**In attendance: Faculty: Sandra Burkett; Nicola Courtright; Edward Melillo, chair; Krupa Shandilya; Adam Sitze. Provost and Dean of the Faculty: Catherine Epstein, *ex officio*. Students: Nicolas Graber-Mitchell '22; Robert Parker '21; Jalen Woodard '23. 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. via Zoom. The committee approved the minutes of March 10, 2021.

**Board of Trustees**

Edward mentioned that the committee will meet with the board on April 9, 2021.

**Change in department status**

Edward asked the committee to review the letters supporting a faculty member's request to change her department affiliation. The committee approved the change.

**Meeting time**

Edward mentioned that the committee will need to negotiate a meeting time for next year. Catherine said the new course schedule will be known by April 12, 2021. Students should look at the courses they hope to take. The best times for the faculty and dean appeared to be a weekly Wednesday meeting at either 8:30 a.m. or 9 a.m.

**Course proposals**

The committee reviewed and approved additional new courses.

**January term**

The committee turned next to a review of the results of a faculty survey and a student survey evaluating this year's experimental January term. Edward noted that both faculty and students appeared to support a continuation of a January term, although student support was a bit more tepid than faculty support. He also noted that faculty members in the STEM areas were largely supportive, with somewhat less support from those in the social sciences, although the numbers responding were low.

Catherine said it is useful for the committee to think about this. The college will definitely repeat the experiment next year, but the question is what form a January term might take after next year. She thought it would also be helpful to know the thoughts of those who did not participate this year and the reasons they chose not to participate.

Nicola praised the benefits of having a January term even if it is not equally representative of each division. Catherine thought that there were probably not enough courses offered and raised the question of whether future iterations of the January term after next year should replicate a real academic term or instead offer a more robust slate of offerings like accounting or robotics that would

not ordinarily be offered in the formal curriculum. She noted that students often wish they could reduce their load to three courses and focus on those courses by adding a January course to their program.

Sandi noted that this year students took a reduced course load. Since that would not be the case next year, would the January term be taken as a ninth class? Would students be allowed to take just three classes in the spring if they took a January course? Catherine thought it would either be a ninth course, or if they had taken a January course, they might be able to reduce their course load in the spring.

Sandi thought the context in which January courses are taken could change participation. This year, students ended classes at Thanksgiving and needed the extra course, having reduced their load to three courses. That might be different next year when exams will run later into December and the spring term will start immediately after the January term ends. Next year's iteration is likely to provide a better picture of how January term might work in a normal year. She preferred the idea of structured offerings that were not of an academic nature, such as scientific glass blowing. While she could imagine offering students a chance to do the lab work associated with courses that they had to take this year without the in-person lab experience, students would have already gotten credit for the course work, so these could not be offered for credit.

Cole thought a permanent January term could offer students some advantages—the ability to take courses they otherwise could not schedule, the flexibility to try new things, or perhaps the ability to reduce their course load for the spring term. But he thought this year's January courses were so compressed that he found it hard to retain anything so the reduction to 16 days for next year's January term worried him. He wondered if January courses should offer full credit, covering the same amount of material, or should instead be half-credit courses, introducing a topic but not providing depth.

Edward suggested looking at other pedagogical models for a January term. Oberlin offers travel courses over interterm, and these could work well in a post-pandemic January term. Adam asked if there had been a decision about whether January 2022 courses would be offered online. Catherine said next year's January term will be flexible to allow faculty who taught remotely a second opportunity to teach their course. Adam noted that the majority does not seem to be harmed by a minority engaging in a January term and noted some small statistical variations in the responses from students by gender and by race. Edward said the committee will review the outcomes again next year.

### **Latin honors**

Edward next asked the committee to return to its discussion of Latin honors. Adam suggested splitting the conversation into short- and long-term recommendations, delaying the more substantive conversation about college values until a later date. For now, the committee could change the rules so that any student recommended for a *magna* would receive it, regardless of class rank, and those recommended for a *summa* would drop at most one level. Catherine thought there could be some relatively simple solutions that many would find appealing, but she wondered whether the committee would ever return then to the bigger question.

Sandi noted the impact of the pandemic and the ways it changed how courses were taken this year, including the more liberal use of the FGO. She thought those changes would likely ripple through students' GPA for a while, affecting class rank, and wondered whether the college should add yet another stop-gap measure in response to the pandemic for this year's seniors.

Adam acknowledged that dropping the requirement that a student's GPA be in the top 40% of the class to qualify for a *magna* raised a real question, but he also observed that the basis for the assignment of grades can vary significantly, and GPA may have ceased to serve as a reliable indicator of college-wide

merit. If he had to choose, he would privilege the department's recommendation, since it would be based on the opinion of the experts who are reading the student's work, over the accumulation of four years of grades assigned by a range of faculty. He thought the committee should reach a decision soon and indicate to the faculty that it will engage in a bigger conversation next year about what it means to adjudicate merit at the college level. He suggested raising the values question at a chairs' meeting to hear a broader range of opinion on the topic. Catherine thought there might be time at the April 16<sup>th</sup> chairs meeting to talk about these issues if a proposal were ready to be discussed. The committee agreed to return to this question at the next meeting and then think about what to propose.

The meeting adjourned at 11:52 a.m.