

Committee on Educational Policy (CEP)

May 6, 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 April 29, 2016.

Campus Planning

David welcomed Jim Brassord for a conversation about campus planning. Jim explained that he has met with the Committee on Priorities and Resources and the College Council and wanted also to meet with the CEP. He said this is an unprecedented period of construction, involving two of the largest projects the college has ever undertaken, and these projects will have a profound impact on the college, providing appropriate spaces for a thriving intellectual life.

He also explained that the college is no longer working with a master plan and is instead developing a much more flexible tool, the campus framework plan. The pivot from the previous science center to the new science building has provided an opportunity to develop this framework plan, and the college is being assisted in this process by Beyer Blinder Belle Architectural Associates and Neil Kittredge, the principal planner. This plan takes the college from a campus with a limited core to a campus plan which will not impose a quad vernacular on the entire campus. Instead, the framework is developing a campus greenway, using developable areas on hillsides to create a more organic flow that is complementary to the quad.

Jim said that defining the greenway allows a range of possibilities for the campus, and creates a green pathway that flows north to south and connects east to west, navigating the elevation changes. It imagines a large fire pit opposite Keefe, transitions into walking paths, an orchard of flowering cherry trees with benches, a large free-form outdoor amphitheater, a slightly depressed lawn bowl with hammocks and Adirondack chairs, a barbecue terrace, and beach volleyball court and half-basketball courts next to the new dorms.

Turning to the building possibilities, Jim noted that the new science center will free 200,000 square feet in McGuire and Merrill, an area that is capable of accommodating many compelling needs that could be mapped into those spaces. There was a focus in strategic planning on ways to create better counseling and health and wellness spaces, on the ability of Valentine to meet the needs of students, and on creating a more vibrant student center. Jim said there is a potential to accommodate those functions in a reimagined Merrill which would redistribute the density on campus, with powerful adjacencies.

Continuing, Jim said Frost Library is not a library for the twenty-first century. While the college has made changes on its margins, they don't represent the vision supported by the library, and Merrill could

accommodate a larger library, along with all of the programming associated with a modern library facility. Alternatively, a renovated Merrill could accommodate an expanded dining facility, an expanded campus center, and an expanded health and wellness center. There is tremendous potential for the building. He noted that there are some pros and cons to moving the library into Merrill. Doing so would change the nature of the quadrangle, which needs the gravitas of a strong anchor at one end. Although it would be possible to move the student functions to the library, a plan to do so would require dealing with the need to bring large service vehicles to the quadrangle to serve dining needs.

Student centers need spaces where people can be seen. Frost also can be reimagined as a building that could support modern programming. The building currently turns its back on the town, and it really needs to connect functionally to the town, so any serious renovation of the building would need to address that issue.

Jim said the next major decision point will be how to use Merrill and McGuire. He said he is strongly leaning towards using Merrill as a student center. He also sees an opportunity to create a more cohesive sense of entrance to the college that would place arts more to the fore. The arts are deeply embedded in the campus at the moment and difficult to access. Arms, for example, is woefully undersized. He believes there is an opportunity to expand the brutalist building into the Converse parking lot. If Valentine were moved to Merrill, the college could then move the art museum into Valentine which would connect with an expanded Arms building, while creating a better site line for the campus. The college would then build a parking garage in the alumni lot, and this might be an opportunity for a public-private partnership with the town, which also needs a parking garage which could be accessed by the community during off-business hours.

Jim stressed that there are a number of possible options for how the campus will evolve and reassured the committee that there is significant capacity within the core campus for expansion. He pointed to opportunities for athletics to grow to accommodate more club and intramural sports, by using the areas adjacent to Pratt Field to the south and also by using the area to the southeast of the campus, close to the overhead power lines. He said he anticipated creating a comprehensive document by next fall. The time frame for these projects will depend on funding, and some projects will not take place for close to a decade.

David thanked him for the presentation, and he departed.

Announcements

Chico said the AAS has elected a new senator to replace Sam—Maeve McNamara '19, a rising sophomore—and has given Chico permission to continue in his capacity representing the AAS. A third student will be named in the fall. The committee agreed to meet at the same time in the fall semester, Friday mornings, 8:30-10 a.m., and in the same room in Cooper House, if it is available.

Transcripts

David then asked the committee to discuss a policy that would restrict faculty from gaining automatic access to the transcripts of students in their classes. This would not alter the advisor's access to a student's transcript and would not prevent a professor from requesting a transcript from the registrar. One option favored by a member of the Committee of Six would be to provide transcripts without grades during pre-registration. Chico thought it would be preferable for the instructor to have a discussion with the student. Catherine E. said in many cases it would not be practical for an instructor to have a conversation with every student. Klára said that discussion should really take place during advising.

Catherine E. said the need to view transcripts is not related to pre-requisites since the registrar has found a good way to handle pre-requisites. Instead it appears to be related more to instructors wanting to hand select students, and that may not be desirable. Catherine S. said under the revised policy the instructor would still be able to request transcripts. This would just add a step for those determined to view them.

Klára thought it could stem from a desire to create the ideal class in terms of gender, background, etc. Sean thought it was undesirable for an instructor to use a process to craft a class that is so lacking in transparency. Students have no way of knowing what profile the professor is seeking when selecting the class. Catherine S. agreed, saying this creates a moving target for students who have no way to know what the requirements really are. The question for her was whether to allow faculty to have easy access to that information. Should they have access to the range of courses a student has taken, without grades?

David said admission to the institution is done in precisely this way. Many people meet the prerequisites. Why shouldn't professors have the same ability to select students? Alex said the argument faculty members make is they want to create a mix of students that will benefit all the students. Klára suggested that was a utopia. Chico said faculty can signal ways they wish to balance a course—for example, by gender—in their course descriptions. Catherine S. said there is a lot of research showing that students from more diverse background can create a better mix, but there are ways to list that information without seeing a transcript. Sean said she thought it related to the open curriculum. Once students have been accepted to the college, they should have access to the full curriculum. She also noted that students are frustrated when they repeatedly cannot get into a course and don't know why. Some students know how to navigate the system and how to approach the professor but others do not, and this puts those who don't know about the back channel at a disadvantage.

Klára said she believes faculty should be able to employ prerequisites, but otherwise, they should allow students to take the class. Catherine E. pointed out that faculty can still obtain a transcript by writing to the registrar. This would merely increase the barriers. Alex added that the change would ensure that faculty are selecting students in a transparent way.

David suggested adding the advisor's name next to the student's name on the class roster to make it easy to check in with an advisor. Faculty could then contact the student's advisor to get relevant information. He said his primary objection to providing transcripts to all instructors is based on the lack

of transparency that might otherwise occur when an instructor cuts a roster. Sean agreed and added that her objection to making transcripts available to instructors is also based on wanting to maintain a curriculum that is open in fact, not just in theory. Sam also agreed, saying that students should be able to structure their courses by knowing what is being selected for. Steven noted that professors for overenrolled classes often ask what previous courses a student has taken. This seems adequate. Catherine S. said faculty may also ask about previous experience in other courses. David expressed concern about a student who might feel uncomfortable divulging that information. However, nothing here would prohibit an instructor from asking the registrar for students' transcripts. Chico noted that students are not aware that faculty can look at their transcripts.

Catherine E. suggested a policy in which faculty would automatically have access to a student's gender, class year, major, and advisor. Faculty should be able to do quite a bit with that information, and if they need more information, they can also ask the registrar for a transcript. David warned that there will be a lot of resentment from faculty colleagues who will argue that this is making things more difficult. Alex suggested that, if access to transcripts is a bad idea, the committee should just ban the access altogether. Sean said she did not want to ask for a faculty fight since there may be times when that access might make sense. But people should know that gaining access will require a request to the registrar.

Catherine S. said there is a huge amount of evidence about the role of implicit bias. She thought it might be easy to be influenced by particular things that might appear on a transcript—for example, a large number of classes at the university, a medical leave, particular patterns of course taking. Alex agreed but said then one could ask where this is leading. Catherine S. said there are some things that can't be prevented, but it is possible to minimize the options. People with compelling reasons for viewing a transcript can contact the registrar to get it. David summed up the critical information—just class year, major, and advisor. Catherine E. added that faculty should not have access to photos until students are enrolled in the class.

The committee agreed that in the future the policy should be that faculty will receive the name, major, name of the student's advisor, and the class year for students registering for a course and will continue to have the option to request a full transcript from the registrar if desired. The registrar will continue to provide pre-requisite information.

Course registration

Moving to a different but related issue, Alex asked that students not be allowed to pre-register for courses that advisors have not pre-approved. The full committee agreed. David said he would send these policy change recommendations to the Committee of Six.

The committee thanked Alex, Steven, and Sam for their many important contributions to the CEP over the last few years, and the meeting adjourned at 10:00 a.m.