

Committee on Educational Policy (CEP)

November 10, 2015

In attendance: Faculty: David S. Hall, chair; Alexander George; Caroline Goutte; Klára Móricz; Sean Redding. 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 3:00 p.m. in the Physics and Astronomy Meeting Room (Merrill Science Center 222) and the committee approved the minutes of the meeting of November 3, 2015.

Updates

Committee members suggested adding as a future agenda item the increasing number of evening commitments—evening exams, extra study sessions, etc.—and the impact these have on the arts. This issue seems to have become more acute in recent years.

David reported that the committee has received a request by American Studies to create a Latino Studies concentration within the American Studies major. Students would graduate in American Studies/Latino Studies. David agreed to add this too to the agenda for a future meeting.

In other updates, David reported that the course evaluations for tenured faculty are scheduled to go live on November 16th.

Proposal to allow E-students to march before graduating

Returning to the "short walk" proposal to allow E-students to march in the May graduation before completing all of their courses, David began by sharing some data from IR about students who graduate mid-year. Over the last 5 years (2011-2015), approximately 5% of graduating students have been e-grads. Of these, 12% have been international students (compared to 9% of all graduates); 20% have been first-generation college students (compared to 16% of all graduates); 47% have been domestic students of color (compared to 38% of all graduates); and 40% have been low-income/Pell grant eligible (compared to 24% of all graduates). Just 6% of the E-grads have graduated late as a consequence of disciplinary issues. While some students fall behind by more than one semester, two-thirds of the graduates who are out of sequence are off by just one semester.

Nancy shared information from the twelve-college exchange, provided by the registrar. Five of the colleges in the exchange permit students to participate in graduation ceremonies prior to completing all credits—Bowdoin College, Connecticut College, Dartmouth College, Middlebury College, and Mount Holyoke College. Of the peer institutions that allow students to walk without completing all requirements, only Connecticut College places the students' names in the program, and only Bowdoin and Connecticut allow the students to walk across the stage. The other schools allow the students to robe and participate in festivities but do not allow them walk across the stage or be listed in the program. Mount Holyoke requires students to be within one credit of graduating, Connecticut and Bowdoin within two credits, Middlebury cites a few credits, and Dartmouth allows students within four

credits to participate. The committee considered the question of credits and resolved that students should be within four credits—the number typically taken in a single semester. No students who have been delayed for disciplinary reasons will be allowed to march early. David said he would rewrite the proposal and discuss it with Kathleen Kilventon, update the text, and then bring the revised document back to the committee.

College Calendar

David then turned to the changes proposed by the College Council for the College Calendar, as presented to the meeting of the Faculty in the Spring, with particular attention to the reduction of the spring semester to 13 weeks. He said he hoped to meet presently with the chair of the College Council to discuss proposed changes to the calendar, and wanted a sense of the CEP before doing so.

Klára said her music students don't want a shorter semester. They believe it will compress all the work into a shorter period and are especially concerned that it will occur at the same time that they are trying to complete their theses. Caroline thought the semester was not being shortened to create a longer interterm. Rather, it is to accommodate a longer reading period and to allow make-up days for snow and days of dialogue. A longer interterm co-existed with a 14 week semester for many years.

Sam thought students would support the 13-week semester if courses weren't simply compressed. Steven thought art students often wanted to have extra time at the end of the semester, and science students want the extra time during January. Klára agreed that removing a week in the spring would make the scheduling of performances almost impossible. She thought the student voice should be heard, and with just five students on the College Council that might not be the case.

Others noted that the proposal allows time during an extended reading period to finish final papers. An examination of the Faculty Handbook, IV.F-G, however, revealed that assignments during reading period are not allowed. On the other hand, take-home final examinations are allowed after the reading period, during the final exam period. The students reported that this did not comport with their experience at the college; they often have assignments that extend into the reading period.

David said the science faculty steering committee has expressed strong support for a longer interterm, primarily for research-related reasons. He thought it was unfortunate that a longer interterm had ended up at least partially in opposition to retaining the current length of the semester, when both were important; and he wondered whether science faculty might favor additional research time during January if it meant shortening the length of the reading period instead. Caroline wondered whether there could be a toggle week in which some might start earlier and others would finish later. She pointed out that, if asked, she would support a longer interterm, but that did not imply that she also wanted a shorter semester. If these were mutually exclusive, then they should be presented to the faculty as such rather than in isolation. She thought that shortening the semester would not "alleviate stress" since the spring semester, which includes the bulk of thesis writing, would be more compressed.

Steven spoke in favor of the 14-week semester. Caroline said she was worried that this schedule, by reserving make-up days, might lead to more snow days. She noted that labs cannot be made up at the end of the semester. She also thought that perhaps part of the perception that reading period is so short is because papers are due after reading period. If the college actually enforced the rule that papers are due on the last day of classes, it might relieve stress during the relatively short reading period. Sam thought it would lead to greater stress if the college forced papers into that time frame. Sean noted that papers assigned in lieu of the final exam can be written during the reading period. Caroline suggested that faculty wanting to do that could end their courses early (after 13 weeks) to accommodate the papers.

NEASC

David next turned to draft language being developed for NEASC accreditation standards, and he wondered whether, if adopted, some of the wording might be read as a way of diminishing faculty control over the curriculum. He pointed out that past college responses to reaccreditation demands – such as the adoption of a mission statement – were initially presented to the faculty as innocuous ways to meet accreditation standards. After adoption, however, the mission statement has been used to justify changes in college policy, academic and otherwise. The committee thought this might require more information from people more closely connected to the reaccreditation process. The meeting adjourned at 4:37 p.m.