Committee on Educational Policy
November 13, 2019

In attendance: Faculty: Tekla Harms; Edward Melillo, chair; Christian Rogowski; Krupa Shandilya; Adam Sitze. Provost/Dean of the Faculty: Catherine Epstein, *ex officio***. Students: Gabriel Echarte '22; Sterling Kee '23; Julia Ralph '21. Recorder: Nancy Ratner, Director of Academic Projects.**

Edward Melillo, chair of the Committee on Educational Policy (CEP), called the meeting to order at 8:45 a.m. in Clark House 100.

Updates from the provost
Catherine informed the committee that the Ad Hoc Committee on Student Learning is addressing issues of accessibility related to academic matters. It has determined that the lack of clarity in what and where information is available online poses a barrier to students and to faculty advisors, reducing students' access to the open curriculum. The ad hoc committee explored departmental websites to better understand the information available to students and faculty and learned, for example, that some departments provide comprehensive information for majors, while others do not. In addition, it found that information for non-majors can be scarce, and that the scope and type of information available is inconsistent across departmental websites. The ad hoc committee recommended that a working group be formed to address how information is presented across departmental and other college websites. Catherine would like to assemble a working group, composed of the director of institutional research (or designee), a faculty member who is a class dean, the director of accessibility services (or designee), Jaya Kannan (or designee), a staff member in Communications, and a faculty member, who will chair the group.

The college might hire an outside firm to do the work, once it is clear what would be most helpful. Departments would need to standardize their websites across the college.

Catherine said she hopes the working group will hold focus groups with students and faculty and consult with the registrar's office, class deans, accessibility services, and information technology to ascertain what students need to navigate paths through the open curriculum, and what faculty need to advise students effectively, with a goal of completing this work by March 1. The working group will then, she hopes, work with campus experts and/or outside consultants to improve digital tools (the college website, course scheduler, and digital catalog) to make transparent and accessible pathways available to students and faculty. She is asking the working group to consider common templates to improve the consistency and transparency of pathways through the curriculum; a revision of the key word system to improve its alignment with the online course catalog, the learning goals, and forms of assessment for courses; and a user-friendly, web-based searchable catalog, by September 1, 2020.

Tekla said navigating the website is often very difficult. Landing pages appear to be designed to attract prospective students, rather than to provide information needed by enrolled students and their faculty advisors. Adam asked if website changes would be mandatory for departments, and if departments would be consulted about website changes. Catherine responded that some of the website changes would likely be mandatory and that departments would be consulted about the changes. The committee supported the provost's plan to appoint a working group to address these issues.

Clarifying policies

The committee turned its attention again to clarifying policies surrounding the Flexible Grading Option, course requirements, the rules about transfer of credits, and deficiencies. The committee focused on clarifying deadlines for the FGO and Pass/Fail options and also clarified that students who find themselves in exceptional circumstances (for disabling medical reasons or grave personal emergencies, not academic difficulties) can, with the permission of their instructor, academic advisor, and class dean, convert a course to a Pass/Fail after the end of the add/drop period but before the last day of classes in that semester. This option is only available, however, if the student has not elected to take any other courses that semester using the FGO or Pass/Fail options.

Student members of the committee said they found the language in these policies opaque and confusing. Gabe recommended moving the third paragraph under Flexible Grading and Pass/Fail Options to the beginning. Doing so would define what is meant by the FGO and Pass/Fail options before the policy launches into the rules that govern those policies. Tekla said she would attempt to rewrite the policy, and Adam offered to clarify the deadlines surrounding those options.

The meeting adjourned at 9:45 a.m.