

Committee on Educational Policy (CEP)

November 3, 2015

In attendance: Faculty: David S. Hall, chair; Alexander George; Caroline Goutte; Klára Móricz; Sean Redding. 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 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 October 27, 2015.

Updates

David reported that the software development is proceeding as expected for senior faculty course evaluations in all respects but one. It appears that nothing will prevent a faculty member from including a place for students' names. This might occur if a department uses the same form for junior and senior faculty course evaluations, since evaluations of untenured faculty require identification and senior faculty forms are meant to be anonymous. The committee suggested the senior faculty forms include a note that the evaluations are intended to be anonymous.

Catherine announced that she is in the process of scheduling a conversation on Tuesday, November 17th, at 7:30 pm, in the Converse Cole Assembly Room for students to meet with faculty members to discuss the student workload and other issues. She hoped faculty would be present. Sam said he would ask the AAS to announce the meeting to students.

In other updates, David said the College Council is taking up the calendar again, and he will likely meet with Professor Courtright to discuss ways for the CEP and College Council to work together on this issue. Nicola is also speaking with the Science Faculty Steering Committee about other calendar-related concerns.

Catherine also reported that the Committee of Six is developing a new statement on academic freedom and will send it to the CEP when it is ready.

Proposal to allow students to march at graduation if they are within four credits of graduating

Kathleen Kilventon has put together a proposal, at the request of the CEP, which would allow students whose graduation has been delayed due to a course deficiency to march with their original class if they are within four courses of graduating. The process, as proposed, would require students to fill out a form requesting the right to march early, and a faculty committee would determine their eligibility. Klára asked if students ever fail to graduate after marching. Nancy reported that other schools that allow this flexibility have had a history of some students never completing their degree. She noted that students' families will be aware that they have not finished their degree since "completion of degree requirements pending" will be noted by their names on the commencement program.

Sam noted that the registrar's proposal would require that students be within four courses of graduating, with no exceptions to that rule. He pointed out that students could actually complete five courses in a single semester and wondered if the deficiency could be extended to five courses. David favored anchoring the number to a particular principle. If that principle was the number of courses usually required in a normal semester, this might have other consequences. Would, for example, a student with a documented disability be allowed to march if the student was within four courses of graduating but would require a full year to complete those courses?

Klára raised concerns about students who have been asked to leave campus for disciplinary reasons. Since the delay in those cases is intended to be punitive, should those students be allowed to march early? While the committee that oversees this process will be able to have thoughtful conversations about individual cases, the committee agreed the policy should include a stipulation that prevents students from benefitting from this option if their graduation has been delayed for disciplinary reasons. Those delayed by academic dismissal or for other reasons would be eligible to apply to the committee, and the committee would consider each case individually.

The committee then returned to how many courses should be completed before a student would become eligible. Should a student have completed all but four courses, or could the number be five? Some members wondered how a specific number might affect transfer students. The committee considered whether it would be better to tie the requirement to being within one semester's courses instead of a set number of courses. If students could reasonably fulfill their course obligations successfully by the end of the following semester, they would be permitted to march early. In the case of a disability, the committee would weigh in on how to proceed. David preferred that the rules be made quite clear, and thought that this might better be achieved with a set number of courses.

The committee also wondered why the process proposed by the registrar included the extra complexity of an exchange of empty diploma tubes for the actual diploma after leaving the stage. They thought the proposed procedure was unnecessarily complex. There was some additional discussion among committee members about whether the idea of allowing "E" students to march early was a good idea that the entire committee supported. Sean said she viewed this proposal as something that would be easy for the college to enact with little cost, and that many students graduating mid-year don't return to campus to march in the spring, particularly if they are low income or international students. The expense is simply too great. Catherine asked Nancy to obtain information on how many students who have delayed graduation might be students of color, as well as first generation, low income, and/or international students.

David said he felt conflicted about this. Graduation is symbolic of a particular accomplishment, which might be diminished by this change. He thought alumni might be disturbed by the dislodging of this symbol. At the same time, he wanted to acknowledge that this is a changing institution and its students have changing needs. He thought it would be helpful to know the numbers and have a sense of what proportion are delayed by disciplinary versus other reasons, as well as the demographics behind the students' delays. He also asked which other institutions also do this. The meeting adjourned at 4:30 p.m.