

## **Committee on Educational Policy**

**October 13, 2022**

**In attendance: Faculty: Robert Benedetto, Chair; Sandra Burkett; Mekhola Gomes; Chris Kingston; Geoffrey Sanborn. Provost and Dean of the Faculty: Catherine Epstein, ex officio. Students: Gent Malushaga '25. Recorder: Nancy Ratner, Director of Academic Projects.**

Rob Benedetto, chair, called the meeting to order at 8:30 a.m. The committee approved the minutes from the previous meeting.

### **Course Credit Policy**

Rob asked the committee to consider the best place to specify that students can earn credit during their senior year for no more than three courses related to thesis or comparable work. Should this be part of the Latin honors policy? Sandi suggested the policy would be more appropriate in the section of the Catalog which discusses courses required for graduation. Nancy said she would discuss this placement with Jesse Barba and bring a proposal to the next meeting.

### **New Courses**

The committee next turned to its review of new courses. Catherine reported that (excluding language classes) 25 classes have five or fewer students this semester, and all but one of these are upper-level courses; the number rises to 48 if upper-level language classes are included in the count.

Geoff urged the committee to think about enrollment caps more broadly, focusing on how a department balances its offerings at the 100- and 200-level with its offerings of upper-level courses. While pointing to the value of maintaining a small number of limited enrollment classes, including those that meet just once a week, he thought the committee could encourage departments to replace a portion of their upper-level courses with more courses that would be open to non-majors.

Sandi suggested the committee also consider how departments articulate what is meant by each level of course. She did not favor mandating the type of courses departments offer, but she thought the committee could encourage greater clarity about what is signified by each course level. Rob asked if there might be a way for the committee to encourage faculty to teach more 100- and 200-level courses and fewer upper-level courses. Geoff said the data suggest that the starkest differences in enrollment levels by department occur at the 100- and 200-level. The average at the 100-level varies from five students to 46 students, and across all their courses students can experience a range in class size from four students to 34 students, depending on their major. Rob said students are disadvantaged by this disparity. Students wishing to take introductory courses in fields outside of STEM often have trouble finding small courses that are not already full, and students in several majors have no access to the small, intimate courses that majors in other fields take for granted. This results from the disparities in faculty-to-student ratios that allow some departments to offer many low-capped courses while faculty and students in other departments cannot. Catherine noted that a liberal arts college should have a range of courses available to students, and these will attract varying levels of enrollments.

Looking at specific courses, committee members also wondered whether untenured professors who cap their courses at very low levels are being made aware of the desirability of balancing these with some

larger-enrollment courses before standing for tenure. The committee also considered the need to make some of the most exciting educational experiences—such as those involving travel—available to more students, even though these courses must limit their enrollment.

Concerned that faculty would be disinclined to subsequently increase the enrollment cap once a low cap has been approved, the committee decided some courses should receive a one-time approval in the hope that the next time the course is offered it will include more students. The committee asked Nancy to inquire about the appropriate course numbers for several courses, ask for expectations to be clarified in a few courses, and ask that courses that are limited by studio space be explicit about this. Nancy said she would contact the faculty about these questions.

One final question was whether the practice of determining enrollment in over-enrolled writing courses based on a writing sample may privilege some kinds of students while creating barriers to others gaining access to instruction from which they would benefit. Geoff said a writing sample ensures that students will be directed towards the levels of courses from which they would derive most benefit to improving their writing. Asked whether there would be any pathway to creative writing courses for students who do not arrive at the college with strong writing skills, Geoff said students who write more can develop those skills.

### **Pass/Fail Policy**

Rob said the committee would take up the question of how to revise the pass/fail policy at the next meeting. The committee suggested inviting Rick López and David Schneider to that discussion.

The meeting adjourned at 9:50 a.m.