

Committee on Educational Policy (CEP)**October 20, 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 6, 2015.

Updates

David reported that the tenured faculty teaching evaluation software is under development but not ready for testing yet.

Catherine informed the committee that several faculty members teaching a first-year seminar (FYS) organized a required field trip over the fall break. While it has been deemed acceptable to allow athletic contests occur over break, she wondered if the committee thought it was problematic for faculty to require participation in a field trip during the break. Students said they would not want to be required to attend a field trip during their break. Klára thought a faculty member considering an activity over break should check with the students beforehand, telegraph in advance that there will be a trip over the break, and, if possible, make the trip optional. Sean noted that might be acceptable for some classes, but not as a requirement for an FYS since students would not have the option of selecting a different class after learning of the requirement. Alex pointed out that fall break is scheduled on the academic calendar as a hiatus from academic activity. He thought that no activity should be scheduled during the fall break. The committee agreed that there should not have been a conflict between the required attendance and a scheduled athletic event. Klára thought an optional event should be possible.

Catherine next informed the committee that Biddy met with students at the MRC after the resignation of Mariana Cruz. What students discussed most was being stressed by their academic workload. They would like to discuss this concern with the faculty, and she said she would be willing to moderate such a conversation with the CEP and perhaps with the curriculum committee. If other faculty wish to come, they too would be welcome. The goal would be to make faculty aware of the students' concerns about the academic workload. David said he didn't think the CEP should organize such a conversation without some context or background supplied by the students, noting as a matter of protocol that students are free to contact the committee chair directly or through their student representatives about matters that they feel require the committee's attention. In the absence of any direct solicitation, he suggested that committee members who wished to participate in conversations about academic workload do so but not on behalf of the CEP. Caroline thought a conversation with faculty was a good idea, but did not think this was a CEP matter. The faculty might attend, but not as representatives of the CEP. Sean was also hesitant for the committee to be present in its official capacity for fear of raising expectations that the committee could take any direct action to alter the workloads of individual courses. In the end, several committee members agreed to attend as interested individual faculty members.

Course proposals

The committee approved the newly submitted course proposals.

Approval of the college copyright policy

David said Bryn Geffert and Justin Smith have developed a new college copyright policy and would like it to be included as part of the Faculty Handbook. As he understood the matter, the role of the CEP was to examine the policy and supply an opinion about whether or not it should be written into the handbook verbatim or included within the handbook as a link.

Turning to the substance of the policy, David said that it struck him as unnecessarily alarmist—particularly its exhortation to consult an attorney at various junctures, and several reminders about personal liability—and noted that in the context of these warnings it included little information about where to turn for assistance in navigating the law. On a more minor matter, he suggested that the references to open access might not belong in this document as they seemed to be unrelated to copyright law. He concluded his remarks by endorsing the "weblink" option over the verbatim inclusion of the document in the handbook. Catherine also had concerns about including this in the handbook since doing so would then require the faculty to approve any future changes to the policy. She suggested inviting Bryn Geffert to the committee to discuss these issues since he and Justin Smith have already vetted the policies.

Alex said he'd be happy to leave this issue to the librarians and attorneys. David said he was uncomfortable leaving matters that impact curricular policy to the attorneys. In this specific case, he was concerned that the tone of the document might deter some faculty members from using copyrighted materials, which might well have an impact on course pedagogy. Klára said the policy would have a curricular impact on how she develops her courses. Chico wondered if this was meant to be a document solely for faculty, or whether students would also need to consider this.

Alex said he saw the Faculty Handbook as a contract between the College and members of the faculty. Fine details of copyright do not belong there. Catherine agreed. If these rules are legally required, the faculty have no say in this. She would prefer that it be present in the Handbook as a link, if at all. Caroline said she did not think it should be in the Faculty Handbook since it provides no information about attorneys whom faculty members should contact.

Klára noted the committee had three choices—include this information in the Faculty Handbook in its entirety; just include a link to this information in the handbook; not include this policy in the handbook. Before deciding these, David said he would contact Bryn with some of these questions. Then the CEP can decide whether it belongs in the handbook at all. Sam said the College Council could then take up this question after the policy language is finalized.

Faculty access to student transcripts

Catherine said she has long been bothered by the faculty's having such easy access to student transcripts. She thought it possible that some faculty might inadvertently prejudge students by looking

at the transcripts. Advisee transcripts serve an important purpose, and faculty writing letters of reference should be able to ask a student for his or her transcript. Faculty can always get access to a student's transcript if they feel they need it but she thought the students' transcripts should not be so easily available. She asked if the committee was open to removing that option. Caroline agreed that faculty should have to opt in rather than opt out of viewing a transcript, the way it had been before the digital system was in place.

Alex noted that, if it's an issue of principle, perhaps faculty should not be able to see any student's transcript. Catherine thought there were times when the instructor might ask the Dean of Students for access to a student's transcript for perfectly legitimate, caring reasons. Klára thought there also might be times when knowing that a student is struggling in other classes, too, might be helpful for an instructor. At those times, however, faculty can always go to the student's advisor to discuss the concern. Caroline suggested that for pedagogical planning (such as balancing student teams at the beginning of a semester), access to transcripts was very important, but such access could be granted to faculty by the registrar upon request. David also wondered if there should be a sunset on the availability of transcripts to advisors. Catherine suggested discussing these two issues with the registrar and asking whether there might be other instances in which the faculty should also consider restricting access. She recommended that the committee share these concerns with the Committee of Six and ask how that committee would want to proceed in changing access.

Default questions for senior faculty course evaluations

The committee approved the following default questions for senior faculty course evaluations:

1. What specific aspects of this course have contributed the most to your learning?
2. In what specific ways have I, as a teacher, contributed to your learning?
3. What specific suggestions do you have for changes that I can make to improve the course or my teaching?

David explained that there are several ways students can be solicited for these evaluations. After a brief discussion, the committee opted for IT to send a digest of course evaluations, with links to each of the courses that they will be asked to evaluate (this will necessarily include all instructors for the course, including lab instructors). Students asked if there would be a way to save an answer before submitting it. Chico suggested the email to students should note that since they will receive multiple requests—one for each instructor, one for lab instructor, etc.—and should recommend that students, if only filling out one, do so for the junior faculty member. They should also be told that if they receive multiple emails for the same course, they should just complete one if the instructor is the same. Klára noted that students will be more motivated to give responses at the midpoint, but faculty will have to pursue that approach on their own.

The committee then discussed the possibility of delaying this electronic approach to course evaluations until the spring semester if the software is not ready for this fall. David will report next week on the software development.

The meeting adjourned at 4:35 p.m.