

**Committee on Educational Policy
September 16, 2020**

In attendance: Faculty: Sandra Burkett; Nicola Courtright; Edward Melillo, chair; Krupa Shandilya; Adam Sitze. Provost and Dean of the Faculty: Catherine Epstein, *ex officio*. Students: Cole Graber-Mitchell '22. Recorder: Nancy Ratner, Director of Academic Projects.

Edward Melillo, chair of the Committee on Educational Policy (CEP), called the meeting to order at 11:00 a.m. via Zoom, and the committee approved the minutes of the meeting on September 9, 2020.

Course Withdrawal Policy

Edward welcomed Professor David Schneider, who was visiting in his role as class dean, to the meeting. David said he wanted to raise three issues with the committee regarding the practical implication of two recently implemented college policies. The most urgent of these involves whether seniors might be permitted the ability to withdraw from one course without penalty. Pre-COVID legislation allows first-, second-, and third-year students a one-time per career withdrawal from a course without penalty if approved by the student's instructor, advisor, and class dean. This type of withdrawal is not available to seniors. With the norm changed to a three-course program during the 2020-21 academic year, the class deans were hoping it might be possible to extend the current withdrawal policy that applies to first-through third-year students to seniors for the duration of this year. He noted that, if granted, this would only apply if the student has not previously taken a course withdrawal and would not drop below the required credits required for graduation.

David noted that, in the past, students who wanted to take an overload of five courses required permission from their advisor and class dean, and this process insured that students only did so after passing a high bar. This level of oversight—and its accompanying warnings and safety procedures—has not been extended to the current “overload” of four courses, which requires only the permission of the advisor. He now finds that a small number of seniors are finding four courses—previously manageable—to be overwhelming. Under current legislation, withdrawing from one of the courses would leave the students with a course deficiency, and although there is some ambiguity in the legislation, it appears that seniors would have to make up this course, regardless of their course credits. Since three courses are now the recommended load, he thought this exclusion of seniors who have not previously taken a withdrawal to be unwarranted. While students could take ameliorating action by changing the course to an FGO, he hoped the students might instead be released from one of their four courses without penalty.

The committee generally favored giving the deans greater latitude in their interpretation of this policy this year, since the introduction of a three-course load norm did not anticipate this complication. Committee members noted that a student taking five courses could drop one in a normal semester, and this seemed to be a parallel situation, since it would have a similar impact on course deficiencies. The committee was inclined to allow a withdrawal without penalty for seniors this year, provided the student's course load exceeded the “normal” load and as long as this would not place the student's track towards graduation in jeopardy.

David said the class deans also hope that it will be possible to extend the option of withdrawal without penalty beyond the tenth week of the semester to the last day of classes as was the case last semester. Students are more easily thrown off-kilter than before COVID, and some additional students who have opted for four courses may need this escape valve when things heat up at the end of the

semester. Given that withdrawal would require the agreement of the instructor, advisor and class dean, the deans would appreciate this greater degree of flexibility. Finally, David expressed concern that students will now be choosing majors after having taken fewer classes than had previously been the case and asked the CEP to think creatively about this.

The committee thought the COVID pandemic should allow the class deans more latitude in considering how to enact these policies. Catherine noted that, with over 800 students signed up for January courses, she was somewhat less concerned about the impact of the lower course load on students' choice of major. The committee asked her to inquire as to whether January enrollees include a good percentage of first-year students. Adam thought it was prudent to worry about this and asked that the committee allocate some of its next meeting to this conversation. He thought it might be worth asking advisors to encourage students to think hard about their course selection as they close in on a major. David finished by inviting increased communication with the class deans and left the meeting at 11:35 a.m.

Edward wondered whether there were any instruments within current language that could be used to manage David's concern about seniors. Adam pointed out that students who are experiencing severe academic difficulty would have a mechanism, but that policy would probably not apply to these particular students. Sandi thought the question might be whether there are, in fact, consequences of a withdrawal if the student has sufficient credits. It seemed like there might be no actual consequences in this case. The committee favored granting the deans some latitude under the current legislation for dealing with seniors who find themselves in this situation. Edward said he would convey that message to David.

Class meeting schedule, spring semester

The committee next approved the class schedule, proposed by Jesse Barba, that would extend the amount of time between teaching blocks and expand the hours available for teaching during the spring 2020 semester, continuing the approach to class scheduling that has been in use for the fall 2020 semester.

Education Studies major

Edward asked the committee to return to its discussion of whether the college should have a major in Education Studies. The committee did so and concluded that, as proposed, Education Studies is likely to be a robust program, with strong intellectual underpinnings. The committee unanimously voted in support of adding a new major in Education Studies and recommended that the Committee of Six be so advised. Edward said he will inform the faculty members proposing this major that it has received the approval of the CEP and will write to the Committee of Six to convey the committee's support of the new major.

Film and Media Studies proposal (FAMS)

The committee next took up the proposal to convert Film and Media Studies (FAMS) to department status. Nicola said this proposal does not have the support of Art and History of Art, despite the suggestion from the FAMS proposal that it did. In fact, her department has not had a full discussion of this idea. While it might support such a move in the future, that is not yet the case.

Catherine expressed concern that department status would change FAMS in critical ways. Many highly engaged faculty who are currently affiliated with FAMS, and in some cases core members, would not choose to change their department affiliation and would suddenly have a much reduced role in the

major. She thought there were advantages in a small college to maintaining programs that cross intellectual boundaries and that provide a porousness for teaching across fields and divisions.

Adam wondered why the same dynamics that allow for cross-listing would not present themselves if FAMS became a department. He thought the strength of the proposal is its curricular argument and asked how many courses would be lost. Catherine said at least one faculty member would be significantly less involved if FAMS became a department and further noted that no FAMS faculty members want to move into FAMS full-time. She also asked the committee to consider whether it wants to devote FTE lines to this curricular endeavor, since this will further splinter the curriculum and reallocate FTE lines.

Krupa suggested the committee ask how many FAMS faculty would be willing to move a portion of their FTE to FAMS if it were to gain department status. Based on her experience with SWAGS, she thought it would be important to have at least one full-time faculty member as a department. While it is not unprecedented to create a department with no full-time members, once established, departments have moved quickly to make a case for a full-time position.

The committee decided to ask FAMS to provide letters of support from the two primarily affected departments and ask any faculty who have served on the FAMS steering committee to indicate their willingness to shift a portion of their FTEs if FAMS gained department status. The committee noted that eventually it would need to hear from their departments about their willingness to allow them to shift allegiances in this way. Edward will write to the proposers with these requests.

The committee agreed that it needed to return to the policy covering degree requirements at the next meeting. The meeting adjourned at 12:10 p.m.