Committee on Educational Policy
September 23, 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.

Edward noted the important role of student members on the committee and asked Cole if he knew the status of new student representatives. Cole said the AAS will be voting in new members at the beginning of the next week.

Workday

Catherine made a plea for one member of the CEP to join the Workday group that will be advising the administration on the design of the Workday Student Module, the new student information system that will ultimately replace AC Data and much else. The Workday group will provide guidance on the ways in which the system supports advising, course registration, the creation of the course catalog, and the tracking of major requirements. Since the guiding principle for these recommendations is to make certain that the new system reflects the academic policies of the college and serves the needs of the faculty, students, departments, and programs, Catherine thought it should include a representative from the Committee on Educational Policy. Catherine said that she would be back in touch with Ted in a month or two, once the committee is ready to begin its work.

Course Requirements

The committee then returned to its discussion of the college policy governing course and degree requirements, a discussion the CEP had begun at the previous meeting in response to changes requested last spring by the class deans to clarify the rules. The committee discussed the language surrounding half courses and also discussed whether the policy, as written, required students to make up courses dropped during their senior year, even if the students had sufficient credits to graduate without the dropped course. The committee decided to continue this conversation at its next meeting.

Update on January Course Enrollments

Catherine reported that 856 students have registered for January term courses. Broken down by class year, this number includes 312 first-year students, 185 sophomores, 250 juniors, and 109 seniors. She noted that students not currently enrolled in January term courses will have another opportunity to do so when the college reopens January pre-registration. This will occur both before and after the conclusion of registration for the spring semester since the registration system cannot handle enrollment for January and Spring simultaneously. Catherine noted that some courses have relatively low enrollments, and several were heavily oversubscribed and will need to be reduced in size, but all courses have attracted student registrations. Psychology 100 will continue to accept any student who enrolls, and there has been quite a bit of interest in statistics, so the Math and Statistics department will offer a second class to accommodate student interest. The feedback in general indicates that students are intrigued by the January courses, a program which could perhaps continue in future years, when the courses would not necessarily be remote. Asked whether E-grads are eligible to take a January term

course, Catherine said they are, but taking a January course will delay their graduation. The committee encouraged her to mention the next enrollment period at the upcoming faculty meeting and suggested she ask advisors of first-year students, in particular, to encourage their advisees to enroll in a January course, to explore the curriculum further.

Committee on Student Learning

At 11:30 a.m. Edward welcomed Adam Honig, chair of the Website Navigability working group of the Committee on Student Learning and Success (CSL). Adam H. said the Website Navigability Working Group, a subgroup of the Ad-hoc Committee on Student Learning (CSL), was formed after the CSL concluded that lack of academic information and lack of consistency in presenting that information on department websites was making it more challenging both for students to take full advantage of the open curriculum and also for academic advisors who might be less familiar with other departments.

To address the lack of consistency, the working group has proposed adopting common templates across department websites, specifically those that fall under the "About the Department" and "About the Major" subtitles. This change would still allow departments the flexibility to add other pages and subpages to their websites as they do now, but department-specific pages would appear below those in the common template. Adam H. emphasized that most of this work would involve reorganizing existing information, not adding new content. If the faculty supports this idea, the communications web team would work individually with each department to reorganize this material, taking into account the specific needs of each department.

Adam H. said the working group's template also recommends that all department websites display a common set of subsections under the "About the Major" tab, with information on Learning Goals; Getting Started in the Major (including sub-pages with placement information, and information for transfer students, if relevant); Major Requirements; Pathways Through the Major (not all departments have this at the moment, but departments that are organized hierarchically would use this section to describe the expected sequence of courses, what to do if starting the major late, etc.; if not hierarchically organized, departments can simply explain that there is no prescribed pathway); Study Away; and Honors. The intention is to allow departments to add more sub-pages, but the common set will always appear first.

Under "Courses," Adam H. said there will continue to be a tab with a dynamic list of courses that feeds directly from the CMS system. The working group recommends, in addition, a new tab with "Courses for Non-Majors," which would also feed dynamically from the CMS system and update automatically. This would allow departments to indicate courses they would suggest for non-majors as a way to encourage greater course exploration. The student focus group, a group of students invited to give feedback to the working group, strongly supported this idea; the working group also plans to discuss this idea with a faculty focus group.

Adam H. explained that the working group believes it is important in an open curriculum to clarify courses available to non-majors. He said the intention is to allow each department to indicate what is meant by this designation (e.g., whether this indicates courses eligible for major credit, courses with no prerequisites, courses that might be suitable for non-majors, or courses explicitly intended for non-majors). To create a dynamic list, the CEP would need to add a keyword for "courses for non-majors." If approved, all departments would use this keyword to indicate suitable courses, and the website would drop the keywords for "art for non-majors" and "science for non-majors." Adam S. thought some small departments would not be able to staff dedicated non-major courses. He also thought placement

information might be controversial for some departments. Adam H. said departments would be able to indicate on their website that all courses are appropriate for non-majors if that is the case. Departments could opt out of the placement information page, which will not be a required page.

Catherine asked what was meant by "placement" since the college also talks about placement in jobs, not just in courses. Adam H. clarified that "placement" will fall under "Getting Started in the Major" and applies only to introductory-level courses. Krupa asked whether the intention was to let departments decide what is meant by a course intended for majors or non-majors, since this could differ depending on the field. Adam H. said departments will be able to explain what they mean by this label. In some cases, this could be a required course for the major but also a course taken by many non-majors. Other departments might determine that all their courses were "suitable" for non-majors, as long as students meet the prerequisites.

Cole asked whether the working group would give some guidance to departments regarding the designation of "courses for non-majors" so advisors will know how to interpret this. Adam H. said the intention is that this designation will indicate courses accessible to students who may not yet have taken a course in the department or taken no more than one or two previous courses. Nicola noted that in small departments, many courses are open to any student, even though the course is not offered at an introductory level. Sandi thought the intention was geared towards courses that are open to students with little background, but this might be too exclusionary. She asked whether the goal was to restrict courses with this designation to students who have only a limited background.

Adam S. thought the designation should be limited to courses that are designed explicitly for non-majors. There is a difference between courses that are open to everyone and those that are designed for those with limited or no prior knowledge. The college already has a number of courses for non-majors in the curriculum. If this keyword were added, the norm would then be that every course not limited to majors would be open to everyone; and this keyword could be used to indicate whether there is a need for prior knowledge. Adam H. asked how a course like Chemistry 151 would be treated. Sandi said that would be considered a course suitable for non-majors—very few students in chemistry classes are majors—although it differs from courses which exclude majors, which are generally offered with a different emphasis.

Cole asked about the purpose of this designation. Is this designed to help students who want to explore a topic that they haven't yet experienced? To identify introductory level courses? To identify courses designed specifically for non-majors? To identify courses without a lot of prerequisites that are open to non-majors? He thought these were meaningful distinctions. Adam H. agreed and explained that the working group wanted to let departments make these decisions themselves. Each department would then explain how students and advisors should interpret the designation. Although the working group decided to call these "courses for non-majors" and let each department define this for itself, it would be open to a different designation. Adam S. said it is important to limit this designation or it will become so broadly distributed that it becomes meaningless. The question is whether these are to be courses for students who want to explore early in their career or students who only want to take one course in the field. The intention of the label will be defeated if it is too broad. He urged that it be limited to courses that are self-consciously designed for students who want to experiment. Adam H. said he thought it would not be so terrible if all courses were available in a department. He would prefer overly broad to overly narrow. There are not that many courses designed specifically for non-majors. The goal is to reduce students' anxiety during course selection.

Cole said he liked the idea of allowing departments to explain how they were using the designation. He assumed they could do this on the "About the Department" page. Adam H. said departments could explain the designation both there and also under the Courses page. Sandi wondered if this should be

called "courses for non-majors" or "courses open to non-majors." These are different. Some departments might have both. Cole offered "courses suggested for non-majors." Edward asked Adam H. to create a list with the questions that the working group would like the committee to discuss at its next meeting. Adam H. said he would do this.

Cole asked about the "placement" webpage. He thought all departments should have this, even if the page just says that all students can place into any of their courses. Edward thought this would also help advisors.

Adam H. next turned to changes to the Course Scheduler tool that the working group has requested. These include allowing students to search by course level, providing a link in the Course Scheduler to the Five-College Catalog, making the Course Scheduler more amenable to mobile phones, and showing course prerequisites within the Course Scheduler tool itself. The working group would like enrollment data to be visible to students in real time, but this change will have to wait until after Workday is in effect.

Adam H. asked whether the CEP might want to reconsider its earlier opposition to allowing students and advisors to search for courses by division (humanities, math and sciences, social sciences, arts). The college uses this breakdown in many of its analyses and behaves like divisions are meaningful, including in its faculty representation on the CEP. Often faculty members advise students to take courses across divisions. Representing this information in an additional tab on the Course Scheduler tool might be helpful. Nicola said she was completely in favor of this. Edward said the CEP will discuss this next week after looking at the minutes from previous discussions on this topic.

Adam H. turned finally to an update on the work of the CSLS. That committee has spent most of the past year addressing accessibility issues, so students with accessibility concerns can elect a balanced, sustainable set of courses. The committee considered but rejected the idea of asking all faculty to post a syllabus during pre-registration. Instead, after considering feedback from the faculty, the committee believes it would be preferable to introduce a set of keywords, or work expectations, identifying the type of work that will generally be expected for each course. The committee will send a revised list of work expectations to departments this fall and will clarify that these expectations are intended just to provide preliminary information about a course, rather than a binding contract. Ideally, if faculty agree to the list, departments will need to backfill all courses in the CMS system. The new list has some overlap with current keywords, so the CSLS will likely recommend merging those two lists after it receives more feedback from departments.

Adam S. thanked Adam H. for all this detailed granular work and asked whether he had any sense whether students use the existing keywords. He thought it arbitrary whether faculty use the current keywords for their courses and wondered whether it was reliable or credible. Adam H. said he thought the keywords were not particularly well used or even reliable, based on feedback from the student focus group. He nevertheless thought that students with accessibility issues will likely use this new set, even if most other students will not. He did think the keyword for "courses for non-majors" would get used.

Adam H. said the CSLS also discussed the accommodations policy which allows flexible attendance for students with chronic physical health concerns. For now, the committee believes the college should continue relying on its existing college statements (the mission statement's reference to "close colloquy" and a statement on attendance in the college catalog: "It is assumed that students will make the most of the educational opportunities available by regularly attending classes and laboratory periods. At the beginning of the semester, all instructors are free to state the policy with regard to absences from their courses. Thereafter, they may take such action as they deem appropriate, or report to the class deans the names of any students who disregard the regulations announced."). Students

who have qualified for "flexible attendance" will be expected to talk to faculty before the course begins; faculty have the right to inform a student if flexible attendance will not work for their class.

Edward thanked Adam H. for his work on these matters and for coming to the meeting and said the committee will discuss his questions at its next meeting. Adam H. left the meeting at 12:12 p.m. and the meeting adjourned shortly thereafter.