

MINUTES—EDUCATIONAL POLICY COMMITTEE

FEBRUARY 5, 2009

Attending: Clare Dunsford, Robin Fleming, Dennis Hale, Stuart Hecht, Gregory Herbers, Bill Keane, Pam Lannutti, Nicholas Lessin, Tom McGuinness, Michael Martin, Tim Mulvey, Elizabeth Nathans, Bill Petri, David Quigley, Harry Rosser, Akua Sarr, Rein Uritam, Barb Viechnicki.

Dean Quigley called the meeting to order at 4:05 p.m. Minutes from the previous meeting were approved with minor modifications.

We began with a discussion of the EPC's voting procedures. We were reminded that faculty and student members each have a full vote. Members of the committee from the Deans Office, alas, have only one vote between them, and *ex officio* members have no vote.

Dean Quigley then notified the EPC that no final decision has been reached on the move from Course-to-Credit, and he is still awaiting word from the Provost. The move is coming, but there is no final decision as to when. Thus, departments are urged to proceed with their implementation plans. Possible deadlines for departments to submit their plans may be 9/10 or 10/10, or the 2/10 or 3/10. The one decision that does appear to have been made is that 120 credits will be required for graduation.

The next order of business was discussion of the proposed Bioethics Interdisciplinary Minor. Robin Fleming and Clare Dunsford summarized the subcommittee discussion on the Minor, which revolved around five questions, a couple of procedural issues, and a worry. First the questions:

- Why does this minor include no Biology or other science requirements?
- How, exactly, is the proposed Bioethics Minor different from a Theology Minor?
- What are the common and specific bioethics courses all students in the minor will take?
- Will the basic "Foundation of Ethics" course be taken only by Bioethics Minors, or will other Theology students be allowed to take this class?
- What are the common and specific bioethics courses that all students pursuing this minor will take?

The procedural issues were more straight-forward. People involved in designing the major had not followed the rules laid out in the Boston College Catalogue description of Interdisciplinary Majors,

in particular, the requirement that Interdisciplinary Majors require courses from at least three disciplines, and that their coordinating committees draw their members from a minimum of three different departments. Finally, we were worried that the final cap-stone R&R for the minor seemed stop-gap and might be difficult in some years to staff. Clare Dunsford has been in contact with the faculty who proposed this minor, and they have been encouraged to rewrite and resubmit their proposal.

Next, Stuart Hecht reported on the Independent Studies form, a draft of which he had submitted and we had discussed during our last EPC meeting. The idea has been presented to department chairs, and he reported that one Chair suggested that the simpler the form, the better. We were informed that Honors is using a form to regularize agreements between faculty and students. The sub-committee is waiting for more feedback from departments and Chairs.

The next order of business was the ever-popular topic of grade inflation. Stuart Hecht began our discussion with the question: what is the problem with grade inflation? Clare Dunsford reiterated the point made at our last meeting that one of the greatest problems with it is that grade compression makes it hard for the Deans' Office to distinguish our best students when they are deciding on awards for Seniors, especially since so many of our students have G.P.A.s between 3.7 and 4.0. Dennis Hale then commented that it was a problem not just for our top students, but for our less able ones, because if these students were actually given the (bad) grades they actually deserved, they might be spurred on to do better work. Harry Rosser then commented that he felt that ideas swirling around grade inflation among students might be the product of notions held by students in the sciences that humanities classes were easier. Tim Mulvey, though, informed us that the Student Quality of Life Committee felt that grade inflation was a "non-issue." Finally, Rein Uritam suggested that, in actual fact, class ranking is more important for graduate school applications than G.P.A; and Stuart Hecht worried that students were more interested in the grades they received than in what they were actually learning in their classes.

The discussion then moved on to more pragmatic issues surrounding grade inflation/compression. Robin Fleming observed that if B.C. were the only university to tackle grade inflation it would do neither B.C. nor its students much good. Bill Petri suggested that our transcripts could include a figure, which would tell the readers of the transcript what percentage of students in each class had received "As" (although David Quigley worried that our computer system might not be able to do this). Akua Sarr made an interesting suggestion, one discussed before by the EPC, that there may be a way to program the computer so that in the moments before a faculty member submits his or her grades on-line, the computer could alert the professor that the grades about to be submitted were different than the department-wide distribution. In the end the committee decided on a couple

of recommendations. The first is a suggestion that grade distributions, set against department and University averages be calculated, and then be given to individual faculty members, so that they could see how their own grading practices compared to those of their colleagues. The second was to pursue Akua's suggestion, and find out whether it is possible for faculty to be alerted, just before they submit their grades, whether their distribution is above the rest of their department's. Finally, it was suggested, once again, that faculty be exhorted to save their "As" for their most extraordinary students.

David Quigley informed us that the Directors of Graduate Studies were also thinking about grade inflation. He suggested that if we were to pursue Akua's idea, we would need to figure Core courses, courses for majors, and course with a lot of seniors separately. David will now go to the Board of Chairs and ask that they begin discussions on grading practices in each of their departments. He would also like some numbers of grade inflation; not, however, a Murphy-style report on grade inflation, but simply some updated numbers.

The EPC then moved onto a different topic: should the EPC ask Interdisciplinary Programs to provide it with a report every five or six years? Akua Sarr thought this was a good idea, and Clare Dunsford remarked that this has been done in the past, with programs providing reports and being reviewed once every six years. Barb Viechnicki, however, believes that a template needs to be developed to facilitate the writing of such review documents.

The meeting ended with a discussion of topics the EPC should take up in the future. Michael Martin suggested that it is time to redefine the work of the committees. The Academic Affairs Committee does a lot of work, and the EPC and the Honors Committee do less. It is not, moreover, always clear what the distinction is in the work of the Academic Affairs Committee and the EPC. Clare Dunsford suggested that the Appeals Committee could be changed from a committee to a couple of appointees, or, perhaps, formed as an ad hoc appeals committee. There was a discussion of perhaps combining the two committees into a kind of super EPC, and having an EPC-I Committee and an EPC-II Committee. Not only would this allow us to rationalize the work of all of the committees, but it would provide B.C. and its faculty with a relatively large body through which to present faculty-driven ideas.

The meeting was adjourned at 5:30 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,
Robin Fleming

