

EPC Revisions of its March Proposal for Changing Arts and Sciences'

Continuance Standards

April, 1998 Faculty Meeting

At the March 1998 Faculty Meeting, EPC presented a two-part proposal on the Arts and Sciences' Continuance Standards as an item for discussion. Now we submit the proposal for faculty vote.

Since the March meeting we have received comments and suggestions from the College community about the original proposal. We are grateful for those comments. In response, we now recommend modifications in some provisions of the original proposal and also elaborate the rationale for our recommended changes. Below are given the original proposal plus the recommended revisions and their elaborations. The latter two are clearly labeled (in bold and italics) ***Revision(s), Reason(s) for Revision(s) and Elaboration*** in the main body of the document. To anticipate, the main revisions and elaborations are in Part I and Part II, sections B1, B8, B9, Ca, Cf, and D. We conclude with responses to some further faculty concerns about the original proposal.

The two parts of the proposal may be voted on separately.

Part I of the EPC Proposal:

Beginning Fall, 1998, a system of mid-semester reporting will be instituted. The reporting will cover all first year students, including both freshmen and transfers, and all students on probation. It need not assign a grade but need only indicate all students doing marginal or unsatisfactory work. Reports will be submitted electronically for distribution to advisors. Revision: Replace above with : Beginning Fall, 1998, a system of mid-semester reporting will be instituted.

The reporting will cover all students doing marginal or unsatisfactory work, not merely first year students and students on probation. Students will have access to the mid-semester reports enabling them to know if their work is unsatisfactory. The mid-semester reports will be given shortly before the advising for pre-registration which is mandatory for all first year students, freshmen and transfers. Hence Academic Advisors can counsel first year students doing unsatisfactory work in the same way they currently do and will continue to have the same advising responsibilities toward such students they currently have. For non-first year students, the Advising Office will notify Advisors only if it receives two or more reports of unsatisfactory work. Advisors of these students are encouraged to meet with them but not required to do so. The exception is where students are on probation, in which case they cannot register for the subsequent semester until they have met with their Advisors. (See Part II, Section Cf below.)

Reasons for the Revisions: 1) The change eliminates faculty learning whether their students are on probation by having the report apply to all students doing unsatisfactory

work. 2) It thereby has the reporting system alert Academic Advisors of all students doing unsatisfactory work. 3) It specifies that students shall have access to the reports so that they can be immediately informed of their unsatisfactory standing. And 4) It also specifies that Academic Advisors will retain the same basic advising duties they already have. (Needless to say, the original rationale for the proposal, stated directly below, also still applies.)

Rationale: The mid-semester reporting system will strengthen academic support for students by enabling advisors to intervene more quickly and hence more effectively when students are in academic trouble. Reporting that students are performing unsatisfactorily will be done on a user-friendly form. Transmitting the reports electronically will insure that advisors can receive information about students' academic performance almost instantaneously. We can be ready for transmitting these reports by next Fall.

(At the April Faculty Meeting, Randy Coleman will use overheads to demonstrate how the reporting system will operate next year.)

Part II of the EPC Proposal: Revised Continuance Standards to take effect Fall, 1999:

Origin of the Continuance Proposal:

Last semester an Ad Hoc Committee was formed with EPC approval for the purpose of reviewing our current Continuance Standards and recommending improvements. Forming such a committee came at the suggestion of the Committee on Academic Status, the Provost and the Dean of Undergraduate Studies.

The Committee, chaired by Mark Fowler (Undergraduate Dean), had this membership: Monica Augustin (Registrar), Randy Coleman (Academic Advising), Karen Cottrell (Associate Provost), Thomas Goodale (Education), Jennifer Krasula (Student), Matthew Lambert (Student), Susie Mirick (Dean of Students), Sharon Reed (Academic Advising), Roger Smith (Government), Trish Volp (Dean of Students), and Tom White (Business).

In discharging its task, the Committee a) compared our Continuance Standards to those of other Virginia and peer institutions, b) collected examples of how the existing Standards harmed students as well as other relevant data, c) consulted with Academic Advising and the Dean of Students to gauge the extent of our support services for at-risk students, and d) ran a check to see how the Committee's proposed new Standards would have affected the academic standing of students at the end of their freshmen years for the classes of 95, 96 and 97.

The committee made a series of recommendations to EPC, which EPC discussed, revised and formulated into the following proposal:

A) Basic Assumptions Behind Proposed Continuance Standards

Underlying the EPC proposal is the expectation that normal academic progress for students is equivalent to earning at least 12 credits per semester with at least a 2.00 QPA. We allow a period of adjustment' for incoming freshmen and transfer students to permit time for them to become accustomed to W&M academic standards. But that period lasts only through students' fourth semester at the College. With this expectation in mind, we recommend that the existing Continuance Standards (presented on pp. 51-2 of the undergraduate Catalog) be supplanted by those below. We further recommend that the new Standards be effective Fall, 1999, not next year. The extra year will enable us to test more fully the support system which we want in place when the new Continuance Standards take effect. They will apply to all new students, including transfers, who enter the College in Fall 1999 or thereafter:

B) Rationales for Proposed New Continuance Standards:

1. Despite the fact that the College amended its Continuance policies only three years ago, they are still flawed. For instance, they allow some students (admittedly, a small number) with poor academic performances to linger on at the College semester after semester even when there is no hope of their ultimately graduating. Also they make more difficult effective earlier intervention with at-risk students which might lead to their ultimate academic success. In the Committee's opinion, under the current Standards we too often intervene too late.

Elaboration of II B1:

The existing Continuance Standards can result in badly harming a few hangers on who are allowed to stay on at the College after it is impossible, given College regulations, for them to graduate. Having students continue to pay tuition under these hopeless circumstances is unethical.

In addition, we seek the highest level of academic achievement for all students. The proposed Continuance Standards will enable us to intervene earlier to help prevent some students from graduating at a level of achievement below their abilities. In other words, we are not recommending raising the Standards just to avoid the aforementioned unethical circumstance. An equally important goal is to help those students who will ultimately graduate, to achieve more before they graduate. Some students who are or have been in academic trouble report that they now think that higher Continuance Standards would have improved their academic performance. We share that opinion.

2. Ours are among the lowest Continuance Standards in Virginia. Although our grading is more stringent, this doesn't warrant having Continuance Standards this low.

3. In contrast to the old, the new Continuance Standards are premised on the idea that students should be able to maintain at least a C average after their sophomore year. This gives them two years to fully adjust to William and Mary's academic demands. Since only W&M credits determine whether Continuance Standards are satisfied, our proposal also allows transfer students time to adjust to transfer shock'. We deem this appropriate.

4. We have consulted with Academic Advising and the Dean of Students offices. Both agree that we would have enough support services for students in academic trouble even if our Continuance Standards were raised in the recommended way and even if we demanded that every student on probation be advised. This is especially true given the new at risk' program under the Dean of Students where students are required to make an appointment for academic consulting upon receiving a warning letter. (At present, a warning is issued when a student's QPA drops below a 2.00.)

5. Under existing rules, underload semesters are disregarded when determining whether students have met Continuance Standards. They count under the proposed new Standards because the Committee believes that students should be expected to make continual progress toward graduation within 10 semesters and because we believe that normally this would impose no great hardship on students.

6. Cases demanding a special response because of special circumstances will still be handled by the Committee on Academic Status, in the belief that exceptions to the Standards should be made where compassion and a wider sense of fairness call for them.

7. Although arrived at through an independent line of reasoning, the recommended new Continuance Standards coincidentally harmonize with the standards suggested by Virginia's Council on Higher Education for the satisfactory academic progress required of students receiving financial aid. (The Council's suggestions are yet to be approved by the Legislature.)

Revisions: Add these rationales:

8. The existing Continuance Standards are excessively complicated and are confusing in their application to faculty and administrators. They are even more confusing to students. The proposed Continuance Standards are clearer, simpler and vastly easier to apply.

9. Our present Continuance Standards are embarrassingly low not only compared to other Virginia schools but at times even in the eyes of our students' parents. Learning of their children's academic performance, parents sometimes ask why with such poor grades these students are not on probation.

C) Proposed New Continuance Standards:

a) Cumulative QPA and minimum W&M credits earned:

End of 1st semester: 1.7 and 12 credits
End of 2nd semester: 1.7 and 24 credits
End of 3rd semester: 1.85 and 36 credits
End of 4th semester: 2.00 and 48 credits
End of 5th semester: 2.00 and 60 credits
End of 6th semester: 2.00 and 72 credits
End of 7th semester: 2.00 and 84 credits
End of 8th semester: 2.00 and 96 credits

End of 9th semester: 2.00 and 108 credits
End of 10th semester: 2.00 and 120 credits

Revision of Ca:

End of 1st semester: 1.7 and 9 credits

Reason for revision: The change gives first semester students more leeway before going on probation, which seems reasonable given that many of them are still adjusting to academic demands of William and Mary's caliber. We feel comfortable in doing this so long as 24 credits are still required by the end of the first year. (Students can reach the 24 credits simply by taking 15 credits in their second semester.) We feel especially secure in making the change given that Freshmen must still meet with their Advisors during the second semester.

b) Students whose work falls below the minimum QPA and earned credit standards will be placed on probation. While on probation, they must earn at least a C average with at least a 12-credit load. They will have one regular semester to bring their work up or beyond the minimum standards-- i.e., the QPA and credit earned requirements. Failing this, they will be required to withdraw from the College.

(Under current rules, students are suspended for at least one semester; but this can be for a longer period if the Committee on Academic Status thinks it in the students' best interest. Before returning, students must normally supply a) a personal statement, b) evidence of a solid work record, paid or unpaid, and c) transcripts from another higher education institution showing that they have received B's or better in two courses-- the credit from these courses isn't transferable to W&M. With very rare exceptions, students who are dropped a second time are not reinstated.)

c) Normally, the suspension period should last one semester, although the duration of suspension will still be at the discretion of the Committee on Academic Status.

d) Students are not removed from probation due to credit earned at William and Mary Summer School. While on probation, students must maintain at least a C average in their W&M Summer School work.

e) Only credit earned in William and Mary courses should count toward determining whether students are meeting Continuance Standards. Hence no transfer, AP or IB credit should count for Continuance, though of course such credit will count toward the 120 credits required for graduation and toward general education and concentration requirements. From a Continuance perspective, students enter William and Mary with a clean slate'.

f) Students must meet at least once with the Dean of Students Office for academic counseling during the first week of the semester in which they are placed on

probation. A mandatory hold will be placed on their record by their Advisors which will be removed once the counseling has occurred. Under such a hold, students can neither register for new classes nor drop classes in which they are already enrolled.

Revisions Cf:

Replace above with: "Students on probation must meet with the Dean of Students Office for academic counseling by the end of the first week of the semester in which they are placed on probation, and with their Academic Advisor before registering for the subsequent semester. These students will not be allowed to register for classes for the subsequent semester until these two advising meetings have occurred. After the Add/Drop period, an administrative Hold will be placed on their records by their Advisors and the Dean of Students which will be removed as soon as they have had the required meetings."

Reasons for revision: 1) Because students may need to change class schedules for many reasons, and because their counseling meetings might not occur until the end of the first week of classes, we have reconsidered placing on a Hold on students' records during the Add/Drop period. Instead a Hold will take effect only after Add/Drop and be removed after the two meetings. 2) The change reinforces the point that these students will be receiving support from both Academic and Dean of Students advisors.

Elaboration: *Two types of counseling are needed by students in academic trouble: the strictly academic advice regularly given by Academic Advisors and the type of counseling furnished by the Dean of Students. Faculty may be less familiar with the second. Besides informing students of relevant workshops and opportunities for tutoring, such counseling helps identify and address personal factors which may interfere with students' greater academic achievement, such as inadequate study skills, ordinary motivational problems, time management, etc. Such counseling does not presuppose that students have deep' psychological problems, although it occasionally leads to appropriate referrals where students seem to have such problems. A Dean of Students' statement of its counseling services is provided at the end of this document.*

g) Students granted underloads are expected to keep up with Continuance Standards and to abide by the ten-semester rule.

h) The Committee on Academic Status will hear individual cases for exceptions to the Standards.

Revision: add:

D) In early spring 1999, EPC will report back to the Faculty on how the new student support services described above are functioning and on whether, in light of these and other findings, it has new concerns about implementing the proposed Continuance Standards in Fall, 1999.

In connection with this future report, we invite all members of the College community to inform the EPC chair or the Dean of Undergraduate Studies of any concerns or questions they would like to be investigated further over the coming year.

For instance, one faculty member has asked us to explore with the Dean of Students and the Committee on Academic Status the advisability of adopting the policy that no freshman be required to withdraw from the College after the first year. (Freshmen could still go on probation according to the proposed Continuance Standards but withdrawal from the College would not be demanded until they had been here for three semesters.)

The year's delay in implementing the proposed Continuance Standards affords the opportunity to grant requests such as this. As indicated, the reason for the delay is the need to test our new student support services, not doubts about the reasonableness of putting in place the proposed Standards. Nonetheless, while we strongly recommend faculty approval of them now, we fully intend to take advantage of the extra year' to perform one last check of their desirability before actually applying them. Conducting such requested inquiries would contribute to that effort. Accordingly, EPC welcomes similar requests and will present the results of its inquiries in its 1999 report.

Response to Additional Faculty Concerns:

1. "Internal stigma" of being on probation: Many experts recommend setting high standards to foster student achievement. Evidence suggests that students will strive to live up to standards, especially highly motivated ones like our own. If this is so, higher expectations mean higher retention rates. Our proposal assumes that it is so.

Setting higher Continuance Standards may mean that at least for a time more students will go on probation. Will this have a psychologically depressing effect on some of these students and cause them to perform even more poorly? Our view is that if some students become seriously depressed owing to poor grades, it will be their low qpa's that depress them, not the fact that they are on probation. That is, just knowing that their qpa's are, say, 1.5 will make such students despondent whether or not they are officially on probation. On the other hand, if they officially have probationary status, we are in a better position to intervene and help them. Too, sometimes even parents, learning of their children's academic performance, call us to ask why with such poor grades these students aren't on probation. Clearly, they think that being placed on probation might help their children with some of their motivational problems. Their opinion is justified if, as we believe, assigning probation expresses the College's commitment to helping all students reach academic success.

2. Impact on minorities: Faculty are rightly concerned about having a diverse student body at William and Mary, and so some faculty wonder about the likely effect of the proposed Continuance Standards on minority retention. At this time we have no substantial evidence that we have higher retention problems for minorities than for nonminorities. Even if such evidence did emerge, we believe that keeping Continuance

Standards low would be a misguided way to address the problem. Rather we should take the tack being proposed-- reinforce supportive services for all students.

3. Impact on freshmen and new transfers: Some faculty wonder if the proposed Continuance Standards do not make excessive academic demands of first year students who may still be adjusting to a more rigorous curriculum. This is a legitimate concern to which we have responded by changing the minimum number of earned credits in the first semester from 12 to 9. We believe that with this change the proposed Standards sufficiently allow for a period of adjustment or a bad first semester'. Reinforcing our belief is the fact that our new mid-semester reporting system will give Advisors and students early warning' when students' performance is unsatisfactory so that countermeasures can be taken earlier, and the fact that the Committee on Academic Status will still be fully in operation to consider fairly and compassionately the special circumstances of individual students. Nonetheless, to inform the faculty more fully of the ramifications of implementing the proposed Standards, we have mapped out three worst case', or at least very bad case', scenarios for hypothetical first year students. Each scenario assumes that the student took 15 credits in the first semester:

A) For the student who would minimally meet our present Continuance Standards in the first semester , the new Standards would place the student on probation for the second semester and would require the following performance to remain at W&M.

| | Credits | Sem. QPA | Tot. QPA |
|------------------------|----------------|-----------------|-----------------|
| First semester | 9 | 1.1 | 1.1 |
| Second semester | 15 | 2.3 | 1.7 |
| or | 18 | 2.2 | 1.7 |

B) For the student who passed twelve credits in the first semester, but earned all Dgrades, the student would be on probation for the second semester and would have to achieve the following performance to remain at W&M.

| | Credits | Sem. QPA | Tot. QPA |
|------------------------|----------------|-----------------|-----------------|
| First semester | 12 | 0.56 | 0.56 |
| Second semester | 12 | 3.13 | 1.7 |
| or | 15 | 2.84 | 1.7 |
| or | 18 | 2.65 | 1.7 |

C) For the student who earns just six credits in the first semester at a D- level, the second semester performance required to remain at W&M is shown below.

| | Credits | Sem. QPA | Tot. QPA |
|------------------------|----------------|-----------------|-----------------|
| First semester | 6 | 0.28 | 0.28 |
| Second semester | 18 | 2.88 | 1.7 |

Note that this scenario shows the minimal level of performance possible in the first semester to allow any hope of meeting the Continuance Standards for the first year.

4. Counseling Services Offered by the Dean of Students: For the faculty's information, we requested that Trish Volp, Dean of Students, provide us with an outline of the counseling services her office furnishes:

The Office of the Dean of Students monitors the academic progress and social standing of all undergraduate students. Staff members assist students identified as potentially needing active academic counseling to enable them to make a successful adjustment to the campus academic community as well as enabling them to meet the academic requirements of the college. This is accomplished by a variety of residence hall programing and special Dean's Group sessions teaching students effective study methods, goal setting techniques and other skills which will enhance the students ability to make effective academic decisions. During these meetings campus resources are identified and institutional policies discussed which could be of assistance to the student. Individual counseling sessions are offered to any student who wishes further guidance or to the student the Dean's office believes needs additional personal intervention. The focus during all contact sessions with the student is to enable the student to be an active and knowledgeable participant in their educational path through the college toward graduation.