

Minutes of the Called Meeting of the
Faculty of Arts and Sciences
The College of William and Mary
April 14, 1998, 4:00 p.m., Millington 150

The meeting was called to order at 4:07 p.m., Dean P. Geoffrey Feiss, presiding.

I. Report of the Educational Policy Committee

Larry Ventis introduced Part II of the proposed new continuance standards (Part I of which was approved at the April 7, 1998 meeting). The three rationales for the proposed changes in standards are: 1) to prevent students from continuing at the college after it has become impossible for them to graduate; 2) to help students who will ultimately graduate to achieve more before they graduate; 3) to simplify the standards. Randy Coleman presented statistics on the number of current undergraduates whose performance would fall below the new continuance standards. Among those with 12 or fewer credits, 43 have QPAs below 1.7. Among those with 37-48 credits (the first point when the new standards require a 2.00 average) 63 have less than a 2.00 QPA, and among those with 109-120 credits 7 have averages below 2.00. Coleman also presented statistics showing what levels of academic performance would be required for students on probation at various points in their academic careers to get themselves off probation within two semesters. Coleman suggested that, given the immense challenge facing students on probation after the first few semesters, it is unrealistic to allow students to drag out this process as they may under the current continuance standards. Coleman clarified a number of points in answer to faculty questions: All of the hypothetical situations presented would be subject to the discretion of the Committee on Academic Standards, which has a number of means for granting exceptions to students with special circumstances. Summer credits cannot help the QPA, but can relieve the number of credits a student must earn each semester. Failed courses may be retaken, but the failing grade remains on the transcript and continues to be factored into the **QPA**.

Student member of the EPC Eric Freeman spoke forcefully in favor of the new continuance standards, arguing that students who are not able to maintain a 2.00 must not be allowed to hold on until the last minute, at which point their families are often heavily in debt. Why not let them move on and succeed elsewhere? Freeman stressed (and later, Dean Patricia Volp affirmed) that this is not an issue that "disproportionately affects minorities and athletes," but one affecting all our students.

Faculty members voiced a number of considerations both opposing and supporting the new standards. Against the new standards was a concern that they could lead to a greater number of students being dismissed, especially since students are (for various reasons) more likely to succeed later in their careers than in their first semesters. If improved support services and the more active intervention procedures approved under Part I of the EPC proposal are effective, why not let those improvements have their positive effect rather than linking them to a change in continuance standards? In support of the new standards, statistical evidence was cited, indicating that students do raise their

performance in response to "reasonable" standards, even at selective institutions. Students tend to perform up to the standards required; currently, students are being told semester by semester that they are "meeting the standards," only to be faced in their senior year with the reality that they will not graduate.

The question was called. The motion, as amended in the April 7, 1998 meeting, was passed by voice vote (with opposition).

The meeting was adjourned at 5:01 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Julie Galambush
Assistant Professor of Religion