

Minutes of the Faculty of Arts and Sciences
The College of William and Mary
December 4, 2001, Millington 150

The meeting was called to order at 3:35 p.m. by Dean Geoffrey Feiss

I. Minutes of the Last Meeting

The minutes of the October 3, 2001 meeting were approved as posted.

II. Elections

The Nominations and Elections Committee conducted elections to the Faculty Affairs Committee with joint appointment to Faculty Assembly (2002-2005)

Area I

X Martha Houle (MLL)

John Oakley (Classics)

Area II

X Judy Ewell (Hist)

Clyde Haulman (Econ)

III. Administrative Reports

Provost Cell was unable to attend the meeting

IV. Report of the Faculty Affairs Committee

On behalf of the Faculty Affairs Committee, Professor Katherine Kulick reported that the Assembly had revised the draft policy on Consensual Amorous Relationships to remove students who serve as instructors from its provisions: a separate policy will cover graduate assistants and undergraduates will be covered by the Student Handbook.

On personnel items, she reported that a short list of candidates for the new Dean of Graduate Studies has been passed on to Dean Feiss. Evaluation committees will be set up for Undergraduate Dean Barbara Watkinson and Dennis Blanton as Director of the Center for Archeological Research. A new Arts and Sciences Development officer will take up work as of mid-February. Finally, David Dessler will be leaving FAC.

Consultations will be held with Dean Feiss on budget initiative priorities, which are topped by graduate stipends, staff positions, maintenance and operations, new faculty lines to enact curriculum reform, and faculty development goals like junior leaves.

FAC is conducting ongoing reviews of departmental procedures (with the Personnel Policy Committee); grade review procedures (proposals for change may be forthcoming); and a 1989 FAC report on merit review systems (which may also result in items for faculty discussion).

At that stage, FAC opened up a discussion of student course loads. Would there be value in reducing the number of courses that students take each semester? Kulick pointed out that, unlike such items as the policy on Consensual Amorous Relations, FAC is just beginning its deliberations on the issue of student course load and has no proposals to suggest at this point. She added that the 1991 curriculum review did have a subcommittee on course loads; after a survey of faculty, departments, peer institutions, it recommended a four course load, but the idea was rejected.

A member of the faculty, endorsing the concept of a reduced course load, pointed out that the idea is not to dilute the academic load. Students have not requested that, and no one should imply that they are deadbeats, because they are as good as any at the nation's top universities. Yet places like Yale and Princeton have a four course load. Moving to that arrangement would not reduce the work load, but it would make it less likely that students would spread themselves too thin. Nor would it require departments to cut the number of courses required of concentrators.

Others agreed that the College's students are strong; the number of courses required for majors is the same as other top universities, so a reduced course load would mean fewer electives.

One faculty member indicated that he had scaled back the amount of work expected in his course not because students are not up to it, but because they carry too heavy a course load.

Some faculty pointed out that the effective course load (when AP credits, etc. are taken into account) is 4.2, and that other top schools with four course loads accept less AP credit. Moreover some, it was suggested, require all juniors and seniors to do large research projects. A "one-size-fits-all" approach does not make sense. Some departments could not reduce the number of courses required for a concentration, so students would end up taking fewer electives. Fewer undergraduates might choose to do a double concentration, including across areas. In response to the question of whether such combinations are really typical, it was pointed out that the previous curriculum review indicated that it was--most tended to be in different areas.

Some faculty urged FAC to get more information, including about and from those currently taking five course loads. In support of a reduced load, some also stressed that we are asking students to do too much; they don't have the time to think about their issues. A faculty member whose son attended the College disagreed, saying that he noticed no such pressure.

In response to the question of how many credits students accumulate, Dean Watkinson noted that it is currently 10.4 (few graduate with just the 120 minimum).

Still, some faculty suggested that "threshing" seems to take place when students spend too much time focusing on different items. Thus perhaps a four course load during each semester of the

first two years and a five course load in each of the final two years--such a mix could work.

A member of the 1991 subcommittee on this issue reported that it had not necessarily assumed all courses would be three credits; it recommended more at four or variable credits. He urged the FAC to study this issue and implied a need to perhaps revisit the GER issue.

A faculty member speaking against the idea of a reduced course load suggested that a maturing process is necessary: students need to learn better time management (cutting their course would simply make them less well-rounded).

V. Report of the Educational Policy Committee

Professor Joan Gavalier delivered EPC's report. She noted that it had established a subcommittee on digital information literacy which had begun work over the summer. It did a pilot program based on modules on Blackboard, but of the 200 students who started only 7 finished (perhaps as a result of a lack of carrots or sticks). Work on that item is ongoing.

A second item raised by EPC was the proposal of a pass-fail option for summer school courses. Currently there is no such option for courses taken here, but those taken abroad do have it. Any policy should really be consistent

A third EPC item was the proposal to allow students to take two (but no more than two) different statistics courses. In reply to a question, she noted that this would not prevent a department from prohibiting concentrators from counting two specific statistics courses.

Additional items under discussion by EPC is whether students may enroll in courses for which they have AP credit and automatic pre-approval for departmental topics courses; enforcing a rule requiring that students declare a concentration by the end of the second semester of junior year.

Professor Gavalier reported that EPC approved 13 new courses, 18 course revisions, 9 GER course certifications, and 3 curriculum changes.

Finally, on behalf of EPC, she proposed a motion that no freshman seminar be granted GER credit on the premise that they are distinct and writing intensive, and that there is no longer great need for GER-designated courses (originally there was something of a shortage). The proposal was discussed with chairs (albeit not with the Assessment Office).

Several faculty members responded with surprise, asking for specific data. They saw the proposal as intrusive into each faculty member's autonomy and a tacit criticism by EPC of something that has worked rather well to date. The freshman seminar was never meant to be just a writing course; they are meant to do more intellectually. True some can't really be assessed as being GER eligible, but EPC simply needs to more rigorously in distinguishing those from the others. Whether or not a course meets GER requirements really depends on the specific course. Indeed the writing intensive character of some can increase their soundness as a GER course. Dean Feiss noted that, since the motion had been introduced without the necessary advanced

notice, it was not really in order anyway and proposed that EPC reconsider it. Professor Gavaler requested that faculty email input on the issue to her. A straw vote to get a preliminary indication of faculty sentiment indicated strong opposition to denying freshmen seminars GER credit.

VI. Report of the Committee on Degrees

Dean Watkinson indicated that the Committee on Degrees report was on the web and asked if there were any questions about it; none were raised.

VII. Report of the Committee on Academic Status

In his report, Professor Jesse Bohl noted that the Committee on Academic Status had taken 884 specific actions, many of them delegated to Dean Watkinson--yet, still, 36 meetings were required. He drew the faculty's attention to two specific issues.

First, the committee wants to discourage unapproved underloads (75-100 of which take place each year), and could do so by either taking students to the Judicial Council (unapproved underloads violate policy), or by compelling violators to withdraw from the College (given that leverage, 79 of 80 cases were settled).

Second, Professor Bohl indicated the large number of requests for late changes to pass-fail and lots of late add requests (from students who have been sitting in the course and then add late).

The Dean adjourned the meeting at 5:00.

Respectfully submitted,

Clay Clemens

Professor of Government