

Academic Affairs Committee Minutes  
November 1, 2016

Present: Karlene Burrell-McRae, Jim Scott, Marta Ameri, Adrienne Carmack, Barbara Moore, Sahar Dissanayake, Jenner Foster, Jacob Adner, Margaret McFadden, Fernando Gouvea, Nadia El-Shaarawi, Muheb Esmat, Jim Sloat, Lisa McDaniels

I. Approval of minutes

The minutes of the previous meeting were approved.

II. Consent Agenda: course approvals

Moved and approved the consent agenda of courses approved by the subcommittee:

GO 398: Advanced Research Methods

GO 498: Passionate Politics: Mobilization and Engagement

TD 241: Playwriting Workshop: Solo Performance and Devised Theater

TD 361: In Yer Face!: Sex, Violence and Modern British Theater

BI 298: Principles of Evolution

PH 333: Experimental Soft Matter Physics

A question from a committee member led to a discussion of how credit hours are determined. Jim Sloat explained the complexities of this calculation, which is an issue in the accreditation process across the country, because the federal government has set a clear definition of how credit hours are to be assigned. This led to further questions and discussion of the NEASC re-accreditation process. Our self-study is underway, in anticipation of a September 2017 visit from the re-accreditation team.

III. Discussion of the A+ grade

The committee reviewed minutes from the discussions held by AAC last April 12<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> and then began a conversation about the question of whether the A+ grade should count for 4.3 in the calculation of the GPA. The issue is one of equity, since some faculty and some departments never use this grade, while others do. As a result, some students may be denied top honors, have lower class ranks, or lose out on GPA-based scholarships, simply because of their majors. Another concern is that A+ grades may have become more common, to reward superb work in a time of grade inflation. There is no standard for what an A+ “means” across the institution.

The committee also reviewed a list of how peer institutions do/do not award and count the A+. There is much variation, and there was consensus that we should do what is best for Colby, not follow anyone else’s lead. There was some discussion of how this practice might affect other schools’ perception of Colby’s rigor, how grad schools use GPA and class rank in admissions decisions, and how our transcripts look to graduate admissions offices. There was also discussion of the variations in the faculty’s sense of when the A+ should be awarded, and a sense that clarifying the standard for all faculty would be helpful. There was also discussion of whether A+ grades motivated students and of whether students thought about grade options when choosing courses. The options on the table remain: 1. Leave things where they are; 2. Get rid of A+; 3. Keep A+, but assign no extra points. The committee will ask the registrar for data about the use of the A+ and will continue the conversation in two weeks.

