

Minutes of the Academic Affairs Committee
October 11, 2016

Present: Margaret McFadden, Jenner Foster, Karlene Burrell-McRae, Jacob Adner, Muheb Esmat, Marta Ameri, Lisa McDaniels, Beth Schiller, Adrienne Carmack, Nadia El-Shaarawi, Jim Sloat

1. Approval of minutes

The minutes were approved, pending correction of a typographical error.

2. Economics Department proposal: Michael Donihue

Chair Michael Donihue arrived with delicious cupcakes, which enabled the committee to turn to his department's proposal with great cheer and rising blood sugar. He explained the rationale for the changes the department wishes to make to their majors, changes that grew largely from recommendations made by their recent Overseers' Visiting Committee. The three changes are: to eliminate one elective from the economics major; to eliminate two electives from the economics-financial markets major; and to eliminate the majors in economics-mathematics, starting with the class of 2020.

The committee had a substantial discussion of the importance of a strong background in mathematics for students pursuing graduate study and particular kinds of finance jobs; Donihue argued that such students would be better served by a math minor, honors work, or a double major with mathematical sciences. He also reported that the Mathematics and Statistics department prefers this plan, as it allows them to advise students who minor in math more effectively. And he said this plan did not substantially change the economics-driven enrollments in the Mathematics and Statistics department. The committee wondered what effects these changes to the major might have on the number of economics majors (already large at 289), but concluded we had no way to predict what will happen. The committee also discussed Donihue's expressed hope that the changes might free up space in faculty schedules to allow them to offer more policy-based courses, which might make the major more attractive to a broader group of students. There was a strong consensus that, if approved, these changes should apply to the class of 2021, not 2020.

3. Revised Computational Biology Proposal

The committee reviewed the latest draft of the proposal, which provided the maps of various pathways into the major that the committee had requested. These maps make clear that students without AP courses could enter the major in the sophomore year and complete it in a timely way.

4. Both proposals will be further discussed and voted on at the next meeting on October 25, 2016.

5. A sub-group of the committee met and decided that the best way to inform the library about the potential demand for library resources in support of new courses was to add Lisa McDaniels (the elected librarian on the committee) to the list of people notified when a course is approved by AAC. She can then ask her colleagues to contact faculty members to see if they have any special resource needs.