

Academic Affairs Committee Minutes  
November 15, 2016

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

- I. Approval of the minutes  
The minutes for November 8<sup>th</sup> were approved.

- II. Discussion of A+ grades

The committee continued its discussion of how to treat A+ grades. We began by looking at data compiled by the registrar that showed which departments and faculty members were assigning which grades. A clear pattern emerged, in which the vast majority of A+ grades were awarded in a few areas of the college, including music lessons and ensembles, language courses taught by visiting faculty, and in some natural science departments. The majority of A+ grades were given by non tenure-stream faculty, suggesting that the best intervention might be to talk with new and visiting faculty, to help them calibrate their grades more appropriately. There was also some thought that this evidence suggested that we should not award 4.3 points for A+ grades, since they were arguably somewhat irregular.

The committee also looked at evidence generated by the registrar that showed how class ranks would change if we counted A+ as 4.0. There was a general consensus that within the top 25 students there was not very significant change; some people did go up or down, but all mostly stayed within the top 25. This suggests the 4.3 is not necessarily advantaging or disadvantaging top students who might be valedictorians or eligible for merit scholarships or honor societies. Making this change would also be operationally challenging for the registrar. Another important question that emerged was how much of a positive motivation the 4.3 might be for very ambitious students.

This led to a broader discussion of how grades had become inflated in the last 15 years; the percentage of A grades has increased dramatically over time from 2001, and the committee generally agreed that the high number of A grades overall was actually much more concerning than the relatively small number of A+ grades. The committee discussed how focused on grades students were encouraged to be by our society, how important GPA had come to be, and whether we might feel responsible for trying to lessen the tremendous pressure on students. What are our values and our educational philosophy? This is a much bigger conversation, which the committee is not sure the entire College is ready to engage. We will bring it to the Division Chairs for advice about whether to proceed at this time.

Next Meeting: December 6<sup>th</sup> at 4:00 p.m. in DIAM 146.

