

## **Academic Affairs Committee—October 24, 2017**

Present: Russ Johnson, Sandy Maisel, Dale Kocevski, Katie Donihue, Adrienne Carmack, Sam Scott, Beth Schiller, Jim Sloat, Loren McClenahan, Marques Houston, Steve Saunders, David Freidenreich, Karlene Burrell-McRae

I. Minutes from the October 10, 2017 meeting were approved.

II. Consent agenda: two course proposals were approved  
    Anthropology: Technocultures  
    English: Climate Fiction

III. Proposed changes to the major in Environmental Computation

This proposal simplifies the major requirements and gives students more flexibility in how to satisfy the requirements. BI163 and BI164 would be no longer required for the major. The committee discussed the potential costs and benefits to having this increased degree of flexibility. It was noted that ES faculty have a high number of advisees, making it potentially difficult to provide the intensive advising this would require. The “Applications” section of the requirements is the most open-ended of all, and many thought this section would benefit from additional structure. The committee decided to send the proposal back to the Environmental Studies program with the suggestion to add some additional clarity and guidance into the “Applications” section.

IV. Information about A+ grades

Two documents were given out to provide context for the discussion. One document showed the distribution of all grades from 2000-01 through 2014-2015, indicating that A+ grades have increased from 2% of the total to 3%, while “regular” A grades have increased from 19% of all grades up to 30% of all grades. The second document showed the number of top-GPA students coming out of departments that awarded high, medium, and low percentages of A+ grades.

Some members of the committee found it quite distressing that such a high percentage of grades (56%) awarded are now some type of A. The “regular” A is now the modal grade, and the average grade is an A-.

The committee generally felt that the A+ grade in particular was not causing a big problem, as departments awarding high percentages of A+ grades were not overrepresented in the number of class marshalls and other top-GPA students.

A lengthy discussion ensued about the possible sources of grade inflation, the extent to which it is (or is not) a problem, and potential remedies that might be attempted. As a first step, it was decided that the committee should look at grading patterns by department/program at a future meeting. After reviewing those data, we can decide if it would be useful to initiate a conversation with the faculty as a whole.

V. Final exam schedule

As a follow-up to last week's discussion, we considered the possibility of introducing a "break" in the final exam period (e.g. from Friday evening through Sunday midday). The benefit of this would be to avoid weekend exams, to which many faculty and students object. It could have the downside of leaving too much unfilled weekend time, which might be filled by some students with unhealthy activities.