

## **Academic Affairs Committee—November 28, 2017**

Present: Sandy Maisel, Steve Saunders, David Freidenreich, Dale Kocevski, Katie Donihue, Barbara Moore, Beth Schiller, Adrienne Carmack, Sam Scott, Russ Johnson, Jim Sloat, Jacob Adner, Loren McClenahan

I. Minutes from the November 14, 2017 meeting were approved.

### II. Distribution Requirements Task Force

The DRTF is continuing with their assigned task of reviewing Colby's distribution requirements. They are looking at the possibility of replacing our current "Area" requirements with "Modes of Inquiry" requirements. The process is still at an early stage, and may take multiple years to be completed. The DRTF is researching practices and policies for general education requirements at other schools, while also consulting and communicating with different groups at Colby. A possible concern expressed by Dale (and by others last May at the faculty retreat) is the risk that important content knowledge might be lost if we focused on modes of inquiry as the defining concept for distribution requirements.

### III. Distribution Requirements Task Force

Russ and Beth (who receive inquiries about such things) asked for some guidance from the committee about when (if ever) it might be appropriate to excuse a student from completing an Area requirement. They also asked if a course (or group of courses) that is not designated to satisfy an Area requirement could (by request) satisfy the requirement for an individual student. The view of the committee was that we should not allow such exceptions.

### IV. Grading Practices

In response to a request from the committee, information was presented about what factors may be correlated with especially high grading. Overall, grading is higher in the Humanities and IDS divisions than it is in the Social Sciences and Natural Sciences divisions. In all divisions, grading is lower in 100 level courses than in 200/300/400 level courses. Grading differences between departments and between divisions occur at all course levels. Faculty who have been at Colby for the longest time tend to award the lowest grades. Faculty in their first 2 years and contingent faculty tend to award the highest grades.

Discussion revolved around why some of these patterns exist and if there might be ways to establish more consistent standards. Newer faculty may be under the most pressure to obtain excellent course evaluations, which could lead them to award higher grades to please students. This might be partially alleviated by more clearly communicating to new faculty the full context in which course evaluations are read, and by providing them with more information about departmental grading norms.

The committee also discussed the possibility of more clearly articulating what we mean by A, B, C (etc.) grades. This could be done (more generally) on a college-wide basis and (more specifically) on an individual course basis. It was

agreed that the committee should work on a college-wide definition of what different grades should mean.