

Academic Affairs Committee—January 16, 2018

Present: Steve Saunders, Dale Kocevski, Loren McClenahan (by phone), Katie Donihue, Barbara Moore, Beth Schiller, Jacob Adner, Sam Scott, Russ Johnson, Jim Sloat, David Freidenreich

I. Minutes from the December 5, 2017 meeting were approved.

II. Revisions to the Environmental Computation major

The “Applications” section of these requirements had been a concern of the committee, and in response to those concerns the ES program and CS department submitted a modified version of the proposed revisions. The listing of the requirements now includes some recommended groupings of “Applications” courses. The committee was in support of the proposed revisions but had concerns about the clarity of the wording used to describe them. Thus, the proposal was approved – with the stipulation that Russ and Beth will work with ES and CS to clarify the wording that will be included in the catalog.

It was reported that the Subcommittee on Academic Scheduling is being formed and should be ready to begin its work in February.

III. Grade definitions

At the 28 November meeting, as part of an extensive discussion of grading, the committee agreed that we should continue to work on developing a college-wide definition of what different grades should mean. That discussion was continued here, starting with a review of some grade definitions that are currently used at other institutions (e.g. Dartmouth, Wellesley, Stanford). It was noted that all of those definitions specify that a B represents “good” quality work and that a C represents work that is “satisfactory” or “acceptable”. This is not perfectly in line with how Colby students currently perceive their grades, but it is closer to how we would prefer them to view the grades. All of the examples we looked at just defined the letter grades (not plusses and minuses), a precedent that the committee decided to follow for Colby as well.

Russ presented some draft language for a possible grading framework to be adopted at Colby:

A

Excellent quality work in meeting all the goals of the course.

Exceptional performance in mastering the course material, in critical analysis, and in written and oral communication, within the context of the course expectations.

B

Good quality work in meeting the goals of the course.

Good performance in mastering the course material, in critical analysis, and in written and oral communication, within the context of the course expectations.

C

Satisfactory work in meeting the goals of the course.

Satisfactory performance in mastering the course material, in critical analysis, and in written and oral communication, within the context of the course expectations.

D

Minimally acceptable work in meeting the goals of the course.

Minimally acceptable performance in mastering the course material, in critical analysis, and in written and oral communication, within the context of the course expectations.

F

Seriously deficient work that is not acceptable.

No credit is awarded.

After some additional discussion, the committee decided to move forward with these grading guidelines (leaving open the possibility of minor wordsmithing at the next meeting). It was also decided to add below the guidelines a clear statement (modeled after the one used at Dartmouth) that we are not prescribing quotas, but rather recommending that we offer challenging courses and grade them so that all high-performing students receive high grades, intermediate-performing students receive intermediate grades, and all low-performing students receive low grades. This will allow our best-performing students to receive grades that distinguish them and low-performing students to receive an honest assessment of their performance.

At our next meeting, we will finalize the grading guidelines and work on a strategy for presenting the guidelines to the whole faculty.