Academic Affairs Committee—February 25, 2020

Present: Steve Saunders, Erin Sheets, Dale Kocevski, Katie Donahue, Sam Scott, Lukas Alexander, Genesis Cazales, Barbara Moore, Lindsey Nelson, Russ Johnson, Jim Sloat.

I. Minutes from the previous meeting (February 11) were approved.

II. Four course proposals for the Bigelow semester were approved.

   BI 384 (Biological Oceanography: Diversity and Function of Ocean Life)
   BI 386 (Oceanographic field methods and independent research)
   CH 385 (Ocean Biogeochemistry on a Changing Planet)
   ES 383 (The Ocean Environment: A Cross-Disciplinary Foundation)

These courses are already being taught as part of the semester program at the Bigelow Laboratory for Ocean Sciences. However, they had not previously gone through our course proposal process. Now they have.

III. One regular course proposal was approved.

   PH 422 (Philosophical Encounters)

IV. Friendly Amendment to the Incomplete Motion

   It was suggested at the February faculty meeting that we should amend the wording of our motion, to clarify that the request for an Incomplete is not guaranteed, and that it will be reviewed by the course instructor in consultation with the class dean and academic advisor. The committee agreed to make such changes (which will be considered a friendly amendment). These changes do not alter the substance of the motion, they just make it more clear that the final decision resides with the course instructor.

V. Report from the Subcommittee on Academic Schedule.

   This year the SoAS has been focusing on the issue of course clustering. The clustering presents problems for students when two courses they need are offered at other same time. It is also challenging for the registrar to find enough classrooms if too many courses are scheduled for peak times. We are currently overusing times in the middle of the day (11:00 and 1:00), and underusing the 8:00 slot. Friday is underutilized for classes.

   For years, the registrar has provided gentle requests to departments, asking them to spread their courses more evenly across the day and week. Since that has not resulted in much success, different strategies need to be considered. As they prepare their curriculums for 2020-21, department chairs are now being provided with more specific information about course clustering, and they are being asked to keep the number of sections at peak times below 50%.