

Committee on Educational Policies and Planning
Annual Report 2020-2021

Function: To recommend to the faculty and administration short and long-range educational plans for the College and thus be instrumental in clarifying, improving and changing major policies and educational procedures; to evaluate Skidmore's present practices and goals.

Membership

2021 Feryaz Ocakli, Political Science, tenured (Chair '20-'21)
2021 Andrew Bozio, English, tenured
2021 Sean Heaney, SGA student representative
2021 Sophia Paulino Adames, SGA student representative
2022 Jina Mao, Management and Business, tenured
2023 Leigh Wilton, Psychology, untenured
2023 Mahesh Shankar, International Affairs, tenured
Cerri Banks, Vice President for Student Affairs
Michael Orr, Vice President for Academic Affairs, Dean of Faculty
Peter von Allmen, Faculty Director of Assessment

CEPP met four times over the summer of 2020, and 25 times during the 2020-2021 academic year. All of the meetings were conducted remotely. The chair of CEPP is also a member of the Institutional Policy and Planning Committee and the Advisory Committee on Off-Campus Programs. It should be noted that Peter von Allmen served on IPPC in the Fall semester only, due to a scheduling conflict. As a former chair of CEPP, Erica Bastress-Dukehart worked with the Advisory Committee on Off-Campus Programs.

The summer of 2020 and the 2020-2021 academic year were quite different from previous years in terms of CEPP's work. The committee worked throughout the summer of 2020 to support the college's efforts to prepare for the upcoming academic year that would be spent under pandemic conditions. Much of what CEPP worked on during the 2020-2021 academic year was focused on urgent decisions regarding the extraordinary conditions of the pandemic, and how we could cope with it as a college community.

Planning for the Fall 2020 Semester

- CEPP consulted with and supported the work of the Academic Planning Working Group in summer 2020.
 - CEPP met four times remotely, and worked via email correspondences throughout the summer.
- Revised the academic calendar for Fall 2020. Decided to start the semester early (Monday, August 24, 2020), and end class meetings, whether remote or in-person, early (Friday, November 20, 2020). This was a significant change to the college's normal operation, and CEPP worked closely with the administration as well as the Academic Planning Working Group in arriving at this decision.
- Produced a document entitled "CEPP Proposal on Minimum Standards for Remote Instruction." This document provided guidance about the minimum standards every Skidmore class should meet for online instruction during the pandemic.
- Discussed whether to hold Student Ratings and Feedback in the Fall 2020 semester, and whether these documents should be used in tenure, promotion, and contract renewal cases.
 - This was a lengthy and difficult conversation that involved numerous parties, including representatives of ATC, PC, and Skidmore Bias Response Group, as well as widespread faculty input.

- CEPP encountered a variety of opinions regarding the feasibility and justice of holding Student Ratings and Feedback in Fall 2020. Many of these opinions were very strongly-held, and, some were mutually exclusive. By the end of the summer, on August 21, 2020, CEPP was able to agree that the college should hold Student Ratings and Feedback in Fall 2020 via an online instrument, but could not agree on whether it would recommend that the results should be shared with ATC, PC, department chairs and program directors, or the administration.
- CEPP's consultations with ATC, PC, and the Skidmore Bias Response Group regarding the Student Ratings and Feedback raised questions about how the college responds to bias incidents in the classroom, and the role the ratings and feedback instruments play in bias response. CEPP continued working on these difficult and important questions throughout the 2020-2021 academic year, while recognizing that its jurisdiction is limited, and that this is a broader conversation that must include other stakeholders across the campus.

Student Ratings and Feedback in the 2020-2021 Academic Year

- CEPP spent much of its energy and many of its meetings discussing whether and how to hold Student Ratings and Feedback in the Fall 2020 and the Spring 2021 semesters.
- CEPP considered the issue from multiple perspectives. The committee discussed the implications of holding, abolishing, and making changes to the implementation of Student Ratings and Feedback in terms of fairness, honesty in responses, bias towards members of the faculty who are in vulnerable groups, bias in the classroom, and pragmatic considerations regarding online implementation and response rates. This was a difficult and lengthy conversation.
- CEPP worked with the Office of Institutional Research, particularly Joe Stankovic and Kerry Nelson, in order to be able to hold Student Ratings online. This was a significant change from earlier semesters, since it was the first time the college transitioned from a paper to an online instrument. Discussions included the feasibility of transitioning to online forms, how the forms would be designed, and how the Office of Institutional Research and the administration would communicate with the faculty and the students regarding the distribution and completion of the Student Ratings forms.
- CEPP worked with the Office of Institutional Research, Associate Dean of the Faculty Michael Arnush, and Learning Experience Designer Aaron Kendall from LEDS to implement Student Feedback forms (Departmental Long Forms) online. Unlike the Student Ratings forms, the departmental long forms could not be managed by the Office of Institutional Research, and required each department to implement its own questionnaire.
- CEPP added two procedural questions to the Student Ratings forms that sought to specify whether the course was taken online, in-person, or in some hybrid format.
- CEPP authored two statements, one that was permanently attached to the Fall 2020 and Spring 2021 Student Ratings reports to provide context for future readers, and the other that was included on the Student Ratings form aimed at reminding students about the COVID-19 conditions as they filled out the surveys.
- CEPP discussed, extensively and from multiple angles, the question of whether the results of the Student Ratings and Feedback forms should be shared with ATC, PC, department chairs and program directors, and the administration. This discussion was entangled with a broader conversation on classroom bias response across campus. The committee weighed strong arguments in favor of and against sharing the results of Student Ratings and

Feedback with the groups mentioned above. The committee's final recommendation was to hold Student Ratings and Feedback online, and to share their results with the relevant parties. CEPP decided that, ultimately, this decision belonged to the faculty as a whole, and brought a motion to the faculty floor on September 4, 2020. After laying over for a month, the motion was put to a vote on October 2, 2020. The results showed that the faculty supported holding Student Ratings and Feedback online in Fall 2020 and sharing their results with the instructors. However, the faculty rejected the part of the motion about sharing the results of the Student Ratings and Feedback forms with ATC, PC, department chairs and program directors, and the administration. This was the final decision on Student Ratings and Feedback for Fall 2020.

- Following the faculty vote in October 2, 2020, CEPP immediately started its conversation on Student Ratings and Feedback for the Spring 2021 semester. The debate stretched over a number of meetings, and followed lines of argumentation similar to Fall 2020. CEPP took the October 2, 2020 faculty vote, as well as the relatively low response rates from the Fall 2020 online Student Ratings forms into consideration when formulating its recommendation for the Spring 2021 semester. CEPP presented a motion to the faculty floor on March 5, 2021. In this motion, CEPP recommended that the college hold Student Ratings and Feedback online in Spring 2021, the results be made available to instructors only, and that individual instructors may share the results of their Student Ratings and Feedback surveys at their discretion. The faculty waived the one-month layover period for the voting, and the motion passed by majority vote.

Changes to the Academic Calendar in Spring 2021

- On September 16, 2020, CEPP discussed making changes to the Spring 2021 academic calendar. Vice President for Academic Affairs and Dean of Faculty Michael Orr reported feedback from faculty and staff constituents regarding a proposal to eliminate the spring break. CEPP debated a number of potential changes to the calendar that would help minimize the risk of a Covid-19 outbreak on campus. CEPP decided to recommend that classes in the Spring 2021 semester begin on February 2, 2021 and end on May 4, 2021. March 16, 2021 was adopted as a break day. This change eliminated the spring break for Spring 2021.

Consultations with Other Committees

- CEPP consulted with the Committee on Academic Standing regarding the Spring 2021 class attendance policy.
 - CEPP provided a report to the faculty at the November 6, 2020 faculty meeting. After discussions involving members of the faculty, students, and the administration, CEPP recommended that the temporary attendance policy that was in effect for Fall 2020 should be left to expire at the end of the semester. CEPP reported that ultimately, decisions on attendance policies would be left to individual faculty members, but the committee encouraged faculty to be flexible and understanding with their students under pandemic conditions.
- CEPP consulted with the Committee on Academic Standing regarding shortening the deadline for students to complete incomplete work by one week for the Fall 2021 semester.

CAS stated that this change would enable students on academic probation to learn about their standing, and discuss academic plans with CAS and other relevant parties sooner. CEPP supported the proposal.

- CEPP consulted with ATC and PC on multiple occasions in the summer of 2020 and the 2020-2021 academic year.
 - Regarding the Fall 2020 Student Ratings and Feedback.
 - Regarding the Spring 2021 Student Ratings and Feedback.
 - Regarding bias incidents in the classroom, and the role of Student Ratings and Feedback in the college's responses to these incidents.
 - Regarding CEPP's proposal for reforming the teaching evaluation process towards a more holistic model.
- CEPP consulted with the Curriculum Committee regarding transfer credit policy for majors.
- CEPP consulted with the Associate Dean of Faculty Michael Arnush and the Director of Bridge Experience Eric Morser regarding the proposal to raise the Bridge Experience course cap from 18 to 20. CEPP supported raising the BE course cap to 20 for 200-level BE courses, but not 300-level BE courses.
- CEPP consulted with the members of the Howard Hughes Medical Institute grant leadership team at Skidmore. A team of science faculty led by Kimberley Frederick were studying the Student Feedback forms (departmental long forms) for the sciences, and CEPP began a collaboration with this team in areas of shared interest.

Reforming the Teaching Evaluation Process Towards a More Holistic Model

- In Spring 2021, CEPP worked extensively on a proposal that could potentially transform how the college conceptualizes and measures "teaching excellence."
- CEPP built on its work from previous years that had focused on a detailed evaluation of Student Ratings and Feedback, how we implement them at Skidmore, and how faculty perceive their effectiveness.
- CEPP decided to take a broader view in Spring 2021. The committee studied how the Faculty Handbook conceptualizes teaching excellence, and discussed the ways in which it may be improved.
- CEPP developed the preliminary draft of a motion that would make significant changes to the Faculty Handbook, redefining what it means to achieve teaching excellence.
- CEPP consulted with members of ATC and PC regarding the committee's proposed changes to the faculty handbook, and received their feedback at a relatively early stage of the proposal development process.
- CEPP plans to develop the motion further in Fall 2021, and eventually bring it to the faculty floor for a vote. The committee anticipates that if this proposal is adopted, it will lead to further changes and refinements in the faculty handbook in the near future. This will transform how we measure and use course evaluations. CEPP's overall goal is to achieve a more holistic model for how the college understands and measures teaching effectiveness.

Respectfully submitted,
Feryaz Ocakli, CEPP chair