

Curriculum Committee 2018-2019 Annual Report

The Curriculum Committee (CC) reviews college curricular matters, ranging from approval of individual, new courses to working with CEPP to oversee the implementation of new General Education requirements. The CC met on a weekly basis during the past academic year, eleven meetings in the fall and ten meetings in the spring.

Overview of Regular Business

During the past academic year, the CC reviewed and ultimately approved 44 distinct, new courses. The committee also reviewed 13 changes to majors and minors from academic departments and programs. Some of the curricular proposals submitted to the CC are simply a matter of small changes, such as an adjustment in a course title. Chairs and Program Directors submit these requests as routine matters, and a standing subcommittee made up of the chair, the Registrar, and the Associate Dean for Student Academic Affairs reviews them. This year, the Routine Matters subcommittee approved 53 minor changes to courses, programs, or majors and minors. The majority of these routine matters created a sliding credit option (1-4) for Professional Internships, as requested by the Associate Dean for Student Academic Affairs.

The CC also reviews travel seminars that faculty develop. According to procedures overseeing the creation and approval of new travel seminars, this spring the CC chair approved two spring 2020 travel seminars: “Botswana: Teaching and Learning in Southern Africa” (Ginny Lee, Education Studies) and a travel experience to the Oregon Shakespeare Festival, attached to “US-American Theater in the 21st Century: Playwrights, Plays, and New Work Development” (John DiResta, Theater).

In addition, at the start of the spring semester, the CC reviewed and approved twelve proposals for new Scribner Seminars. These seminars were first reviewed, revised, and endorsed by the FYE director, Janet Casey.

Other Business

This year, the Curriculum Committee also devoted its attention to three larger initiatives: criteria for new courses under the recently approved General Education requirements, IdeaLab and Pop-up courses, and Physical Activity credit for Varsity Athletic Participation (VAP).

General Education Requirements

At the close of the 2017-2018 academic year, the Curriculum Committee reviewed the guidelines and criteria that CEPP had prepared for the new course categories in the newly approved General Education requirements. Unfortunately, last year’s CC found these guidelines unclear and imprecise both for developing new courses and especially for reviewing and approving these

courses. This academic year, the work of refining the definition, guidelines, and criteria of the new General Education courses continued under the auspices of small task forces established by CEPP with members from the CC and the general faculty. The task forces focused on the new “Bridge” courses and the Senior Coda requirement. By spring break, these working groups had developed effective criteria. Following the recommendation of the chairs of the CC and CEPP, at the end of the semester the Dean of the Faculty appointed a faculty coordinator to oversee the development of “Bridge” courses, in a role analogous to the curricular responsibilities of the FYE director. Dean Orr named Eric Morser, associate professor of History, to this position.

A much larger working group was established to develop a new approach to the World Language requirement for English Language Learners that would give these students the option to study English further as an alternative means to fulfill this requirement. Recognizing that the underlying motivation for such an option was to provide ELL students with focused English language instruction, the working group ultimately proposed to CEPP that the College create an English language class that would parallel an intermediate level World Language course (see Appendix A). Although this approach varies from the proposal sketched out in the new General Education proposal, CEPP accepted this plan, and work will continue in this area in the fall.

Idea Lab and Pop-up Courses

The introduction of IdeaLab and Pop-up courses into the curriculum posed problems for the CC last year, as these innovative approaches to academic courses were not fully defined, thus making proposals hard to evaluate. This year, the Curriculum Committee met with the leaders of the IdeaLab Steering Committee, Sarah Sweeney (Art) and Jess Sullivan (Psychology), to clarify these exciting but confounding new types of courses. Sweeney and Sullivan offered the following proposal, which the CC accepted:

IdeaLab Courses

- must fulfill at least one requirement:
 - different/re-imagined student/professor dynamics
 - new temporal course structure
 - between disciplinary boundaries (co-teaching, industry/community/scholar, maker/scholar)
 - new or emerging fields; time sensitive subject – pop-up courses only
- must meet all of the following requirements
 - mandated contact hours
 - objectives/schedule
 - approved by the IdeaLab Steering Committee
 - approved by the applicant’s chair
 - secured appropriate resources (including funding and classroom space);
- must provide substantial pedagogical value to students involved; no prerequisites

IdeaLab and Pop-up courses will initially be offered as special topics courses at the 100-, 200-, or 300- levels under the IL designation. Faculty will then decide if they will discontinue the class or

if they would like to have their IdeaLab courses housed in an existing academic department or program, where it would be subject to CC approval.

Physical Activity Credit for Varsity Athletic Participation

Last academic year, Gail Cummings-Danson, Director of Athletics--with the endorsement of the Athletic Council and CEPP—submitted a proposal to allow varsity athletes to receive Physical Activity credit for their participation on varsity sports teams. The CC approved the proposal at the end of the fall semester and, upon recommendation of the Dean of the Faculty, announced this new credit option for student athletes to the faculty in a letter to the faculty (see Appendix B).

2019-2020 Agenda

In addition to its ongoing oversight of the college curriculum, the CC anticipates that the 2019-2020 academic year will be particularly busy as faculty begin to submit new and revised courses to fulfill the new General Education requirements. In addition, the CC plans to examine the role of free-standing minors within the curriculum, whether such minors always follow a pathway to a major, their status within the curriculum, and the demands they place on the faculty.

Curriculum Committee Membership

2018-2019 Members

Xiaoshuo Hou (Sociology)
Eliza Kent (Religion, spring 2019)
Christopher Mann (Political Science, fall 2018)
Michael Marx, Chair (English)
Corinne Moss-Racusin (Psychology)
Robert ParkeHarrison (Studio Art)
Ben Cantor, Student Representative (spring 2019)

Ron Seyb, Associate Dean of the Faculty (ex officio)
Dave Deconno, Registrar (ex officio)
Sharon Clemmey, Registrar's Office (ex officio)
Shanon Philips, Registrar's Office (ex officio)

2019-2020 Members

Maria Lander (World Languages and Literatures)
Christopher Mann (Political Science, spring 2020)
Michael Marx, Chair (English)
Corinne Moss-Racusin (Psychology)
Jowoon Park (Anthropology, fall 2019)

Robert ParkeHarrison (Studio Art)
TBA, Student Representative

Ron Seyb, Associate Dean of the Faculty (ex officio)
Dave Deconno, Registrar (ex officio)
Sharon Clemmey, Registrar's Office (ex officio)
Shanon Philips, Registrar's Office (ex officio)

Appendix A: Proposed Memo to CEPP on Revisions to the Language Study Requirement

The Language Study Working Group has reached a point that we need some guidance from CEPP. The Working Group is operating under the assumption that the proposed English Language Study course is an indirect way to address the needs of ELL students and not simply a means of lightening the burden of the language study requirement. We are concerned, in particular, that what we think is the proper content for the “ELL course” that the CEPP legislation states will be offered to a subset of our non-native English speakers is not consistent with the letter of that legislation. In short, we do not think that we should use the Language Study requirement to provide ELL support to those students. We instead think that this “alternative Language Study course” should be comparable to the intermediate level language courses offered by WLL. We provide below both the rationale for our positions and a smattering of questions that we think need to be addressed before we can move forward with the implementation of the new Language Study requirement.

(1) Although we strongly endorse providing more instruction and academic support for ELL students, we do not think that the Language Study requirement should be understood as providing such support for the portion of our non-native English speaking students requiring it. The principal reason why we hold this position is that ELL support is quite different from the study of English as a language. ELL courses provide non-native speakers of English with the proficiency in English they need to manage college-level work. In contrast, an English Language Study course provides a more comprehensive study of English as a language, an investigation that can extend to its cultural context and history (as occurs in other courses that satisfy the all-college Language Study requirement). While an English language course may be one piece of a mosaic of efforts to provide students with ELL support (a mosaic that now includes EN 100: English Language Skills and GN 151: English for Academic Engagement), it is not the place where ELL support could be successfully delivered. If CEPP and the College believe that some non-native speakers could logically fulfill their World Language requirement by taking an English-language study course, the best approach might be to design a course analogous to the intermediate-level language courses offered by World Languages and Literatures. These courses provide students with instruction in the speaking, writing, and reading of the language. Such a course, again, would not adequately address needed ELL support. In sum, we do not think that this “alternative Language Study course” can substitute for an EW course or a sequence of EW courses, which should form part of overall ELL support. While such a course would certainly be a welcome alternative for students for whom English is a “foreign” language, it would not obviate the student’s need to complete the EW requirements either with some combination of EN 100, EN 103, and EN 105.

On a related note, if we were to institute an WLE 281 course, we would need to address the question of whether there would be institutional support for students to continue their study of English beyond this threshold or “gateway” course. In short, if we do establish such a course, are we making an implicit promise to students that they will be able to engage in more advanced study of English as a language?

(2) The CEPP legislation stipulates that “A committee of stakeholders convened by CEPP will consult with experts in the field of ELL (English Language Learning) to determine what scores on the ACT, SAT, TOEFL, and IELTS indicate the need for ELL instruction.” Scores on the standardized tests cited here do not strike us as a good way to determine which non-native English speakers should be asked to complete their Language Study requirement with an English language

course and which need a fuller program of ELL support. We propose that non-native English speakers take a placement examination in English. WebCape, which is used by WLL to place students in the languages in which they offer instruction, has an English placement exam that we may be able to use to determine which students will be eligible to take an English language course to fulfill their language study requirement. We also think that paths into the English language course other than the English placement exam should be available to students once they arrive on campus. Students, for example, who enroll in GN 151 might be recommended to enroll in an English language course to fulfill their Language Study requirement.

(3) The CEPP legislation does not state where this English language course will “live.” If the plan is to place it in WLL, then it does not appear that WLL currently has the staff to deliver such a course. The college may hence need to create a new position, one that will include the delivery of English language courses as part of its job description.

The staffing question is one that we will need to bring to the Dean’s Office. The more critical question, however, is, if CEPP agrees with the rationale we have provided above for modifying CEPP’s Language Study legislation, do we need to bring our revision of the Language Study Requirement back to the faculty for its endorsement, or can we treat our proposed changes as “implementation decisions”?

29 March 2019

Appendix B: Varsity Athletic Participation

Dear Colleagues,

The Curriculum Committee (CC) regularly reviews new courses for inclusion in the College curriculum. Occasionally, the approval of a new course touches so many members of the College community that the CC deems it valuable to directly inform the faculty of its decision. This past fall, the Curriculum Committee approved Physical Activity for Varsity Athletic Participation (PA for VAP). This new course proposal came to the CC from Director of Athletics Gail Cummings-Danson, after endorsement by CEPP and approval by the Athletic Council.

Physical Activity for Varsity Athletic Participation will allow varsity athletes the option to earn one Physical Activity (PA) credit per year for the varsity sport they participate in. Credit will be assigned for the semester that the sport holds its national championship. If students participate in two sports, they could earn up to six PA credits. PA for VAP is not available to students during their first semester (fall) at Skidmore nor during their final semester at Skidmore (spring). During their four years at Skidmore, then, a single sport varsity athlete could earn up to three non-liberal arts credits of PA. Currently, all Skidmore students may earn a total of eight credits in PA during their tenure at the college.

Students registering for Physical Activity for Varsity Athletic Participation must take the course S/U. The head coach for the varsity sport will assign grades and pass them on to the Director of Athletics, who will submit the S/U grades to the registrar.

PA for VAP goes into effect in Fall 2019.

The practice of granting students non-liberal arts credit for participation in a co-curricular activities that are devoted to developing a skill already occurs outside the Varsity Athletics Program. Students working on the College's theatre productions, for example, may earn two credits by enrolling in "TH 129: Theater Production." Similarly, students participating in the Jazz Ensemble, Skidmore Chorus, or Skidmore Orchestra may earn one credit per semester for these experiences. The new PA for VAP extends this opportunity to earn non-liberal arts credit for practicing a skill to our student-athletes.

Many other Division III and Liberty League schools already have similar opportunities for their varsity athletes to earn credit for their participation on a varsity team.

If you have any questions about the PA for VAP course, or if you would like further details, please contact me, Director of Athletics Gail Cummings-Danson, or Caroline D'Abate, Athletic Council Chair. Although we will not re-announce this new course at the February Faculty meeting, all three of us will be present to answer questions and participate in any discussion, should the need emerge.

In peace,

Michael Steven Marx

Chair, Curriculum Committee