Committee on Academic Policy
Annual Report for AY 2005-2006 (draft)

The Committee on Academic Policy met twenty-five times during the 2005-2006 academic year. The members of the committee were Professors Jim Doyle (chair), Bill Farr (secretary), David Dollenmayer, Nikos Kazantzis, Fred Looft, David Olinger; Associate Provost Lance Schachterle (ex officio); and student members Sunny Manivannan (A term), Brenden Brown (A, B, C terms), Jessica Amt (C term), Alison Leflore (D term), and Michael Hyde (D term).

A. Appointments and elections

1. Fred Looft was appointed to be CAP's representative to the University Council in terms A, B, and C. Bill Farr was appointed for term D.

2. David Dollenmayer was appointed to be CAP's representative to the Undergraduate Outcomes Assessment Committee (UOAC) for the 2005-2006 academic year.

B. New programs and program changes brought to the faculty

1. A proposal to establish the Bachelor of Arts degree as a WPI degree was discussed at several meetings in September and October. It was brought before the faculty and approved at the December meeting.

2. A proposal to establish a specific Bachelor of Arts degree in Liberal and Engineering Studies was discussed and revised at several meetings. It was approved by the faculty at the January faculty meeting.

3. Faculty from Chemical Engineering and Civil and Environmental Engineering presented an interdisciplinary proposal for an Environmental Engineering major. This proposal was discussed at several CAP meetings. It was approved by the faculty at the May meeting.

C. Academic Policy issues brought to the faculty

1. A subcommittee of CAP (Farr, Schachterle, Manivannan (student), Brown (student)) presented a proposal to change the criteria for graduation honors. In recent years the number of students awarded honors at graduation had been near 50%. The criteria in the proposal were targeted at reducing this number to around 33%. The proposal was discussed and approved by CAP and then approved by the faculty at the March meeting. The new policy will take effect with students graduating in May, 2010.

2. In the 2004-2005 academic year, the faculty authorized an experiment with varying the lengths of WPI undergraduate courses in E term of 2005. Dean Arlene Lowenstein reported to CAP in November of 2005 on the results of that experiment. Based on the results, CAP proposed to the faculty that the experiment be continued in E term 2006. This was approved at the December faculty meeting.
3. The SS&PS department brought a proposal to CAP to discontinue their major program in Economics and Technology. This program had been in existence since 1995, but had graduated only three students and none since 1997. This proposal was approved by CAP and subsequently by the faculty at the November meeting.

4. CAP discussed the issue of exams scheduled outside of class time. A resolution providing guidelines for such exams was drafted, discussed, approved, and presented to the faculty for endorsement. The resolution was endorsed by the faculty at the April meeting.

D. CAP Oversight and General Policy Review

1. CAP was involved throughout the year in efforts to transform the recommendations in several of the Presidential Commission reports into concrete proposals to be brought before the faculty. The result was the creation of three CAP subcommittees, one on Revising the Sufficiency, one on General Education and the First Year, and one on SAT-optional Admissions. More detail on these subcommittees is given below in Section E.

2. CAP met with Provost Simpson and Jill Rulfs in April of 2006 to discuss potential academic policy issues involving Gateway Park. Provost Simpson outlined steps that are being taken to minimize the impact of the move on the undergraduate program. She also informed CAP of the plans for using the space in Goddard Hall and Salisbury Laboratories that will become available.

3. CAP met with Kristin Tichenor, Associate Vice President for Enrollment management, in October of 2005 to discuss the impact of recent changes in WPI's academic programs, e.g. the IMGD major, on WPI admissions.

4. CAP discussed UOAC's Assessment Plan for Institutional Outcomes. After some changes, CAP endorsed UOAC's assessment plan and authorized UOAC to distribute it to appropriate members of the WPI community.

5. Mark Claypool reported to CAP on the status of the Interactive Media and Game Design (IMGD) major. Overall, the new major has been very successful and has attracted more students than were predicted. Courses for the major have also proved popular with students who are not IMGD majors. This has caused some problems with over-subscribed classes and a shortage of lab space. The over-subscribed class issue is being addressed by offering more classes next year but the lab issue may have to wait for space to be freed up by the move to Gateway Park.

5. Jim Doyle reported to CAP on the status of the Psychological Sciences major. There are currently five students in the program, which is a bit below predictions. While this is disappointing, it isn't a serious problem because there are no major-specific courses that need to be populated. Instead, depth is provided to majors by special tailoring of projects in the current courses.

6. CAP worked with the registrar and the faculty to promote electronic
submission of grades for courses. This saves a lot of time for the registrar's staff and allows a later deadline for grade submission. Several improvements in the process were made, especially for submission of project grades, and faculty participation was well over 90%.

7. Presidential Commission C had recommended a reorganization of the teaching schedule into fewer but longer classes to free up more time for faculty research. (The number of contact hours would not change.) This issue was discussed by CAP, who did not feel disposed to propose this change to faculty. On the other hand, CAP is not opposed to voluntary experiments by faculty.

8. CAP met with a faculty member who had concerns about the policy for selecting students for Individually Sponsored Research Projects (ISRP) off-campus. CAP then met with Provost Simpson and Natalie Mello of IGSD to discuss the policy and the faculty member's concerns. CAP found that the current policy was appropriate, but suggested two additions to the catalog to clarify matters.

9. A conflict between the general rules for a minor and the specific rules for the Social Science minor was resolved when SS&PS volunteered to change their rules to make them consistent with the general rules.

10. CAP formed a subcommittee (Farr, Kazantzis, Olinger, and Brown) to look into the issue of undergraduate credit for WPI graduate courses. After obtaining feedback from WPI faculty alerting the subcommittee to potential conflicts with the BS/MS program, the effort was abandoned and the subcommittee dissolved.

11. CAP discussed a number of resource issues related to increasing entering class sizes. These issues were originally raised by FAP and submitted to COG, who forwarded them to CAP for comments. Dale Snyder and Chuck Kornik attended a CAP meeting to discuss steps that had been taken address past problems with course enrollment for first year students. CAP then asked COG to consider forming an Ad Hoc Committee on Enrollment Planning to address these issues.

12. The Student Government Association (SGA) came to CAP with a proposal to establish an on-line system for rating instructors. CAP provided feedback to the group listing some of CAP's concerns with such a system. In particular, CAP concluded that it would be inappropriate for information contained in such a system to be used in any way during considerations of salary, tenure, and promotion.

13. The long-neglected Report of the Ad Hoc Committee on the Definition and Evaluation of Effective Teaching was discussed. This report was submitted to CAP in January of 2004. CAP agreed that the report contained some good ideas and was a step in the right direction and forwarded it to Provost Simpson.

E. Continuing work
1. CAP worked throughout the year to make the machine-readable form of the Student Course Report as close as possible to what was passed by the faculty. This form was first used in A term of 2005. Several changes to the form were made during the year. There were also changes in procedure. The most important of these were to return the forms to the instructor and not to scan any of the written comments. CAP also worked with CCC and the registrar to make summary data from the forms available in printed and electronic form. This work is continuing and CAP expects to bring a proposal before the faculty in A term of 2006.

2. CAP continued to work with CCC and library staff on the e-projects pilot program to allow electronic submission of IQP and MQP reports. This effort was moderately successful with essentially all off-campus IQP's and about 70 on-campus IQP and MQP projects being submitted electronically. CAP plans to bring a proposal before the faculty in A term of 2006 to make electronic submission of IQP and MQP reports the default mechanism.

3. The report of Presidential Commission A2 recommended that changes be made to the Sufficiency requirement. Discussions between CAP, President Berkey, Commission members, and the HUA chair resulted in the creation of a CAP Subcommittee on Revising the Sufficiency. The subcommittee is charged with producing a detailed proposal by October of 2006.

4. A Subcommittee on General Education and the First Year has been formed to carry on the work begun by Commission A1. The subcommittee is charged with making detailed proposals for general education requirements and enhancements to the first year experience by October of 2006.

5. Commission F had recommended making SAT scores optional for admission. A Subcommittee on SAT-optional Admissions Policy was formed. The subcommittee is awaiting results from the current admissions cycle and two ongoing College Board surveys before making a recommendation.

6. A group from the IGSD presented a proposal to CAP for student evaluation of IQP advising both on and off campus. CAP was generally in favor of the proposal, but its implementation will have to wait until after CAP's proposal to make electronic submission of IQP (and MQP) reports the default is presented to the faculty. This is because the evaluation process is part of the electronic project submission process.

7. Paul Davis of IGSD asked CAP to endorse a plan to develop a set of learning outcomes for the IQP. The resulting outcomes would then be submitted first to UOAC and then to the faculty via CAP. CAP endorsed the plan.

8. CAP discussed the issue of a joint MQP for a double major. Current rules call for two one-unit MQP's to be completed, one in each major. CAP was generally supportive of the idea of a joint MQP of less than two units containing at least one unit of work acceptable to each department, but details remain to be worked out. This issue will be revisited in 2006-2007.
9. The Division of Extended Education presented a proposal to establish undergraduate certificate programs analogous to graduate certificate programs WPI currently offers. Under the proposal, WPI courses would mostly be presented off-campus by WPI tenure-track or adjunct faculty using the same texts and syllabi as used on campus. This proposal will be revised and considered again by CAP in 2006-2007.

Submitted by
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