

Subject: Arts and Sciences/EPPC faculty meeting Wednesday

Dear colleague,

Please join members of the Educational Policy and Planning Committee (EPPC) for a discussion of course point values and undergraduate and graduate student programs in the Arts and Sciences. The faculty meeting on Wednesday, Nov. 20, 2:00 -4:00, in Lerner 555 will be devoted to this topic.

The EPPC took up this topic for several reasons. Undergraduates and faculty have expressed concerns about student workloads, the increasing numbers of double majors, and the fact that we require our undergraduates to take a higher number of courses than do our peers.

Faculty also note that masters programs have expanded, posing questions for departments about how to integrate those students into existing course structures and develop new ones . The EPPC is also aware that our curricular structures are not uniform across the Arts and Sciences, with seminars and lectures variably weighted at 3 and 4 points. It seemed time to see whether it might be possible as a first step to bring internal consistency to our course point allocation, possibly by moving to a norm of 4-points for most seminar and lecture courses. We might also wish to discuss whether the "cap" on the number of points for which a student may enroll without special permission is at the right level.

As the committee began to work, however, it confronted a number of paradoxes. First, although faculty committees have tended to deplore the expansion of double majors, students continue to pursue multiple programs in ever increasing numbers, and some faculty and departments worry that any attempt to reverse those trends would react on their programs in particular. Second, while the curricular decision-making structure at Columbia is highly decentralized, instruction is actually highly integrated. Decisions made by any one part of Arts and Sciences have financial and curricular implications for other parts (including for the School for Continuing Education); the practices of the Arts and Sciences also affect other Columbia schools such as SEAS and Barnard. Finally, the framework within which credits are set derives from federal standards subject to approval through the accreditation process. The Arts and Sciences is scheduled for its decennial re-accreditation by Middle States in 2015-16; any changes we desire to make should take account of the requirements and schedule of the reaccreditation process.

These difficulties do not mean that Arts and Sciences should do nothing towards rationalizing our system; they do mean, however, that any changes need to be carefully thought through, consensual, and undertaken with an understanding of their implications for all programs and schools. The EPPC thus began by gathering data on current departmental and school weighting practices for undergraduate and graduate courses, current student loads and choices for undergraduates and masters students, and trends in programs over time.

We will present that information and the issues it raises at the faculty meeting on Nov. 20, after which the EPPC will distribute information to departments and curricular committees, asking some targeted questions. The discussion on Nov. 20 and those responses will guide our work, so we urge you to attend.

Yours sincerely,

Susan Pedersen  
Professor of History  
Chair, EPPC