Annual Report
Educational Policy Committee
2009-2010

Membership: Claire Buck (Chair), Darlene Boroviak (Fall), Barbara Darling Smith (Spring), Sean McPherson (Fall), Kathy Morgan (Spring), Leah Niederstadt (Fall), Tommy Ratliff, Russell Williams, President Ronald Crutcher, Provost Linda Eisenmann, Student Representatives: Jonathan Wolinsky ’10, Lindsey Nielsen ’11 (Fall), Kenneth Monroe ’12.

The Educational Policy Committee met once per week during the fall semester of 2009 and the spring semester of 2010. Susan Colson kept minutes and provided invaluable administrative support including the upkeep of a new onCourse site, which allowed the Committee to go paper free and will, going forward, create a permanent and accessible archive for documents.

Approvals:
1. Faculty Connections: The Committee approved 3 new Faculty Connections, and the addition of one course each to two existing Faculty Connections, and the temporary addition of 2 courses taught by Mellon Post-doctoral Fellows to another Faculty Connection. One proposal for a mega-connection was turned down on the grounds that there was insufficient planning for collaboration between the faculty members teaching. One course was removed from an existing Faculty Connection.

2. Student Initiated Connections: The Connections Sub-Committee considered 126 proposals, approved 94, and rejected 8 (3 of which were approved on appeal to the Committee and another 2 were approved by CAAS). Another 24 were returned to the student with the recommendation that they revise and resubmit. Of these 19 were approved on resubmission.

3. Beyond the West: The Committee approved BW designation for 6 courses.

4. New Courses: 9 new course proposals were approved, including 1 short course for summer 2010.

Decision: The Committee agreed that in the absence of guidelines on the relationship of credit to contact hours, assignments etc. short courses should come to the Educational Policy Committee for approval prior to being taught for the first time, while simultaneously going to the Provost’s office for budget approval. The Committee believes that short courses raise wider staffing issues that should be discussed in the fall.

5. Majors and Minors:
   i. Approval was given to revisions to the requirements for the Hispanic Studies Major, the Chemistry Major, Bioinformatics, and the Environmental Science Major, which has introduced area concentrations in Biology, Chemistry, and Geology.
ii. Approval was given to a new Minor in Pre-professional Journalism Studies.

iii. Two course name changes and 4 proposals to renumber courses were approved.

Course Capping
The Committee spent much time considering the question of caps, and found it necessary to revisit and amend the guidelines created by last year’s Committee. This was a controversial and complex process, which after consultation with Educational Policy Sub-Committees, Department Chairs’ Meetings, and Faculty Meetings has led to a new document: the “Educational Policy Committee Guidelines and Procedures for Limiting Course Enrollment.” The “Guidelines and Procedures” are designed to help the Provost make informed and consistent decisions about cap requests from department chairs and program coordinators. The Committee agreed that decisions about course enrollment limits need to be made by the Provost, who will consult with the Committee where policy issues arise. The present guidelines also require some further discussion in the coming year about the Capstone Seminar, Experiential Learning, and other matters that may arise as the new caps come into effect. They remain a work in progress. (Guidelines attached as Appendix A)

Accreditation
The Committee met with the NEASC Visiting Team to explain its role and the Wheaton Curriculum.

Beyond the West Guidelines
The Committee considered a draft of guidelines for the approval of courses for Beyond the West designation. The draft was referred to the Global Advisory Sub-Committee for discussion, and has now been sent for comment to all faculty members teaching BW courses. The revised guidelines will come to a Faculty Meeting in the fall for discussion.

Evaluation
At the suggestion of the Curriculum Evaluation Sub-Committee, the Committee introduced a new practice of reviewing Banner data reports on the curriculum. Data on the Natural Science and Foreign Language requirement were reported by CES and discussed. Data from the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) on Connections and Infusion were also discussed, leading to a presentation of Infusion data at the May 7th Faculty Meeting. Consideration of the NS data led to further discussions with representatives from the Natural Science Division, while Foreign Languages faculty were invited to a discussion of the data with the Chair of CES. The inclusion of regular reports, following discussion of the data by faculty with interest and responsibility in the area, offers a model for keeping regular oversight of the curriculum. CES plans to work with the Registrar and faculty on other Banner data reports for next year.

The Chair of CES also met with the Committee to discuss the next steps for curriculum evaluation, and it was agreed that the Sub-Committee should work with the Provost’s Office, the Committee, and the faculty to design a five-year evaluation plan.
General Education Curriculum:
Over the year, the Committee also held discussions with the College Writing Director, the Chair of the Experiential Learning Sub-Committee, the Chair of the Global Education Advisory Sub-Committee and the Dean for the Center for Global Education, the First Year Seminar Coordinator, members of LTLC, the chair of the Curriculum Support Committee. The Chair attended 2 Department Chairs Meetings and met with the college archivists, and with designated representative from the Planning and Priorities Committee.

Decision:
- Agreed to invite departments to begin a review of their writing plans.
- Reviewed and gave support to the development of a Wheaton program in Bhutan.
- Agreed to work with LTLC, Scott Hamlin, Margaret Gardiner, and the new Associate Vice President for Library and Information Services to develop a systematic departmental approach to information fluency.
- Agreed to develop priorities for curriculum support and an implementation plan.
- Provide guidance as PPC considers issues with curricular implications.

First Year Seminar
Recommended a First Year Seminar review of academic goals to be designed by the Provost, the FYS Coordinator, and FYS Sub-Committee.

Capstone
The Committee discussed the Capstone on a number of occasions, and agreed that work needed to continue in collecting information on the different forms the Capstone takes, and on the definition of shared learning outcomes at the level of the major and as a general Wheaton Curriculum requirement. The Committee sees a need to re-examine the ways in which we support the different forms of the Capstone Experience across single and multi-disciplinary programs of all different sizes.

Connections
The Committee discussed Connections on a number of occasions, and considered matters arising from two Connections Sub-Committee reports.

Decision:
The Committee:
- Asked the Provost and the new Curriculum Support Committee to look at ongoing and systematic ways of encouraging the development of new Faculty Connections proposals.
- Agreed that faculty should inform the Committee when either discontinuing a Connection or withdrawing a course from a Connection in order that we can track the number and robustness of Faculty Connections.
• Agreed that approval of all new Faculty Connections proposals will in future depend on a clear outline of the types of collaborative pedagogy that the instructors expect to use.

• Agreed that, effective from Fall 2010, a student may not propose a Student Initiated Connection any later than the SIC deadline in their penultimate semester of study. The proposal may include courses that will be completed in the last semester. Effective with class of 2011.

• Proposed amendment to Faculty Legislation removing First Year Seminar from the Connections requirement.

• Agreed that an independent study can be used for Student Initiated Connections, provided that the student writes up a description of the study and compile a reading list.

• Agreed to the development of procedural guidelines for the Connection Subcommittee, and to move to electronic submission of SIC proposals.

Housekeeping:

Educational Policy Sub-Committees

The Committee completed a review of the sub-committees, developed charges for the Connections Subcommittee and the new Curriculum Support Sub-Committee, and worked with COCA to regularize the staffing and running of the sub-committees. The Global Education Advisory Sub-Committee reported on its review of charges, membership, and the processes whereby faculty became involved in program development and administration. The Sub-Committee concluded that, in future, the committee would nominate potential program directors for approval by the Educational Policy Committee. It also recommended that the Committee review all proposals for faculty led programs once they have been considered by GEAC for preliminary review and comment, including those in their first iteration. This and other recommendations as to the Sub-Committee charges and membership will need to be considered in the fall.

Educational Policy Committee

The Committee made various changes to its practice; in addition to the new onCourse site, it is creating a Policy index, an annual calendar and procedural guidelines, and an additional onCourse site where all faculty and staff can access minutes and other policy documents. It has also been agreed that Susan Colson, as secretary to the Committee, will become Wheaton’s official record holder for matters such as the Majors and the Minors.

Respectfully Submitted,

Claire Buck
Chair, Educational Policy Committee
Appendix A:

Educational Policy Committee: Guidelines and Procedures for Limiting Course Enrollment

Preamble:

The Educational Policy Committee has developed principles and guidelines to help the Provost make informed and consistent decisions about cap requests from department chairs and program coordinators. Deciding what might constitute acceptable norms for minimum enrollment across the wide array of disciplines and programs on offer at Wheaton is necessarily complex, frequently involving needs of comparable merit, which are nevertheless incompatible. The guidelines are designed to foster equity for students, faculty, and programs while expressing the values of our curriculum. They reflect a need for a general framework for decisions that is publicly understood so that the Provost does not have to decide on an ad hoc basis.

Over a two year period, the Committee has considered a range of issues including students’ ability to access courses; the potential relationship of class size to retention, whether as a matter of access to courses or student experience within courses; quality of first year and sophomore experience; curriculum innovation; the development of new teaching practices; discipline-specific instruction values and histories; the needs of the general education curriculum and interdisciplinary programs; and safety and classroom capacity where the subject matter precludes the use of another classroom.

General Principles:

1. Wheaton prides itself on the relationships that develop as a result of close interaction between students and faculty.

2. Wheaton recognizes and embraces a diverse set of teaching pedagogies and is committed to course enrollments that support these pedagogies, recognizing that there is a need to support innovative pedagogy across classes of all sizes.

3. Students must be able to take courses that enable them to complete majors, minors, and general education requirements, as well as to pursue other subjects of interest.

4. Enrollment limits will be reviewed in Fall 2011 and periodically after that. The Educational Policy Committee will consult with the Provost to determine appropriate review dates.

Enrollment Caps By Course Level:

1. 100 Level courses – 45 students
2. 200 Level courses – 36 students

3. 300 Level courses – 24 students

4. Upper Level Seminar courses – 16 students (capstone seminars still under discussion)

Individual courses at the various levels may have enrollment limits higher that those listed above. Wheaton is committed to limiting the number of courses with enrollments above 50 students.

Rationales for Exceptions to the Enrollment Caps:

A number of courses across the college are currently capped at lower enrollment numbers. In order to develop guidelines the Committee is in the process of reviewing the rationale for lower caps. Beginning in the spring of 2009 the Committee has been examining the types of rationale for lower enrollment caps in specific courses. Recommendations for the Provost are listed below, including areas that require more consideration:

1. The Committee recommends that future requests for enrollment limits should come from departments through the chair after discussion at a department meeting, and consultation with the coordinators of interdisciplinary programs whose courses may be impacted by the proposal. Coordinators of interdisciplinary majors should also be able to request lower enrollment caps for courses administered and taught within that major.

2. The Committee’s main focus was initially on courses that play a central role in Wheaton’s general education requirements. It is the Committee’s view that the general education requirements express some shared priorities for student learning in their Wheaton education. It is not always the case that courses fulfilling the general education requirement require a lower enrollment cap, but it was agreed that there are requirements in which pedagogic needs, the student constituency, and the place of the course in the curriculum make such a cap desirable. The Committee’s initial recommendations to the Provost are listed in the appendix.

The Committee also considered the relationship of class size to Wheaton’s embedded model of writing instruction in the disciplines, and invited the College Writing Director with the Writing Sub-Committee to help create viable guidelines. As a result, the Educational Policy Committee recommends the following:

- Writing: A course should be considered for an exception on the basis of embedded writing instruction with clear and explicit goals about student writing in the discipline. The rationale should go beyond simply stating that significant writing will be assigned. It should explain how writing would be taught. The request should include a rationale explaining the course’s relationship to the
department’s overall writing plan, the major, and the general education priorities and requirements that are implemented through the department. The request should explain this rationale in detail, including a summary of what steps the department has taken to review and update its writing plan in consultation with the College Writing Director. The Writing Sub-Committee will advise the Provost on all proposals involving writing instruction in their rationale.

3. The Committee also identified practical considerations that impact class size:

- Some courses are limited by the available dedicated workspaces and computer workstations, and by safety concerns, such as laboratory, studio, archive, and performance courses. In such cases, the enrollment limit will need to be determined by the number of workspaces, where the subject matter precludes the use of another classroom.

4. The Committee has identified four other areas for further discussion: Experiential, the Capstone Seminar, pedagogies specific to the disciplines taught within departments and programs, and the type of information that might be included in future cap requests to the Provost. The Committee is therefore continuing its examination of the rationale for limited enrollments as follows:

- Experiential: To be discussed in the spring in the context of a full review of the relationship of class size to different forms of experiential learning in consultation with the chair of the Experiential Sub-Committee (Grace Baron). For the 2011 schedule, departments may continue with any individual course limits that are already in place as a result of Hewlett funding;

- Capstone Seminar: To be decided in the spring in the context of a full review of the relationship of resources to the capstone experience in all its forms. For the 2011 schedule, departments and programs should continue with their present limits;

- Discipline specific instruction needs: The Committee has already invited departments and programs to provide information about their rationale for lower course enrollment caps to assist it in crafting guidelines. These are now being discussed.

- The Committee considers that the Provost will need some common information from departments to give context for cap requests in the future. These will likely include:

  a) the department’s rationale for the lower enrollment cap;

  b) an explanation of the role of the capped course or courses in the department’s offerings as a whole. This explanation would address the major or majors taught within the department; interdisciplinary majors or minors; requirements for majors or
minors (such as Education) administered outside the department, and the general education curriculum including both course based requirements and integrated elements such as writing, global, and experiential learning;

c) the department’s assessment of the impact of the cap on access to and quality of student experience in courses fulfilling general education requirements;

d) enrollment data for all the department’s courses for the past three years.

Appendix:

The Committee initially recommends to the Provost that the following courses continue to be capped at their present enrollment limits:

- First Year Seminar and English 101 sections (16 students)
- Writing support courses: English 010 (students with learning disabilities) and 060 (English Language Learners) (12 students)
- All 100-level Quantitative Analysis courses (30 students)
- Language courses involving direct language instruction as main goal (draft language under discussion): 20 students
- Laboratory Sections – Even divisors of the total course enrollment, often determined by number of workstations or safety considerations.