

## Committee on Academic Policy (CAP): Meeting Minutes

March 27, 2023, 3:00 pm  
Meeting #18 AY2022-2023  
Meeting held via Zoom

Attendees: Brigitte Servatius (MA, CAP Chair), Jeanine Dudle (CEE, EDC Representative), Fiona Levey (MME), Samuel Levitan '24 (Student Representative), Berk Calli (RBE), Sarah Miles (Registrar), Oleg Pavlov (SSPS), Sarah Wodin-Schwartz (MME), Arne Gericke (Dean of Undergraduate Studies)

Guests: Charlie Morse (Dean of Student Wellness), Paula Fitzpatrick (Director of the Center for Wellbeing)

1. The meeting was called to order at 3:02 pm.
2. Dean Morse and Dr. Fitzpatrick visited CAP to discuss the possibility of developing an **undergraduate policy that could address the surge in student requests for special accommodations** when students miss classes and other academic work, including exams.

The discussion included the following points:

- a. The need for policy: Mental health has been a growing concern at universities across the country. WPI is no exception. CAP members commented that it appears that students have been increasingly requesting special accommodations due to health and other reasons. However, our university does not have a clear policy on how to handle such requests.
- b. Lack of doctor's notes: Due to federal laws, instructors cannot ask students for doctor's notes when students request deadline extensions or makeup exams for health reasons. Because of the privacy concerns, the health professionals on campus cannot disclose student health information to instructors either. The prevailing reason given for missed deadlines and exams is the mental health.
- c. Workload and stress: Overall, WPI faculty tend to be flexible and accommodating when students request extended deadlines or makeup exams due to sickness. However, this practice adds significantly to the workload and stress levels of the faculty and teaching assistants. The lack of clear guidelines on how their requests would be processed also adds to student stress.
- d. Proctored exams: In-person proctoring of makeup exams on campus on a large scale would require additional resources. The wide adoption of online proctoring might not be a good option either due to the ease of cheating.
- e. Possible other options: CAP members brought up several potential solutions to the surge in requests for special accommodations. One option might be for instructors to assign online quizzes that must be submitted during a time window with a limited time allocated for the test. Another option, though controversial, is to allow students to request a Pass / Fall grade, as was temporarily allowed during COVID. Students can also take an Incomplete, even though clear time limits are needed for when the missing work must be submitted. An additional complexity of assigning an Incomplete exists when a course was taught by an adjunct who no longer has a contract with WPI, and therefore is not available to process late student submissions.

- f. Best practices: CAP will collaborate with Dean Morse and Dr. Fitzpatrick in identifying and reviewing the best practices that exist across universities that offer a balance between flexibility and structure. Dean Morse and Dr. Fitzpatrick will identify best practices and report back to CAP.
3. The policy to “Allow Changes to Submitted Student Works for Protecting Privacy and Confidentiality” will be soon offered to the Faculty for voting.
4. The meeting adjourned at 3:58 pm.

Respectfully submitted,  
Oleg Pavlov  
CAP Secretary, D 2023