

Committee on Academic Policy (CAP): Meeting Minutes
Tuesday, April 23, 2024
Meeting #21 AY2023-2024

Attendees: B. Calli (RBE, CAP chair), C. Chartier (Student Representative), J. Dudle (CEAE, EDC Representative), A. Gericke (Dean of Undergraduate Studies, ad interim), F. Levey (MME), D. Heilman (CBC, UOAC representative), B. Servatius (MA, CITP representative), P. Fitzpatrick (Director, Center for Well Being)

1. The meeting was called to order at 11:04 am.
2. Paula Fitzpatrick joined the meeting to add her perspective regarding CAP's flexibility survey data. It appeared from the CAP flexibility survey that 80% of faculty had not adopted flexibility practices. A minority appeared to be resistant to trying any flexibility practices, and there was a similar minority who had fully adopted these policies. She sees the large group in the middle as providing a good opportunity to increase adoption of and experimenting with flexibility practices. Based on some emerging research evidence, Paula reported that strategic adoption of flexibility practices may reduce fatigue of faculty by cutting down on the number of student requests for flexibility. Based on previous conversations with members of CAP and other faculty members, she proposed that distributing a suggested set of recommendations and guidelines for various learning and teaching situations, which have the endorsement of departments, would be an effective path forward. She believes this would be a nice "middle way" between a policy and disseminating suggestions as a report. She would like to work with the Morgan Teaching and Learning Center and CAP to finalize and disseminate the set of recommended practices to faculty. Paula would like to do some pilot studies on using the materials in various learning environments. One CAP member gave some perspective from faculty who are resistant to adopting flexibility practices – there is concern that not having deadlines will ultimately be detrimental to student workforce preparation. Paula said there is data to support positive outcomes for both faculty and students when flexibility guidelines are adopted. Other CAP members discussed the option of having a policy that faculty include their course flexibility policies in their syllabi. There was also discussion about how faculty can best be supported in navigating this issue by providing clarity to faculty for general institutional expectations without infringing on academic freedom. The guidelines should contain some clear guidance on emergency situations, and also some general recommendations for day-to-day course management. Currently health services sends a message to faculty if students are going to be out for an extended period, and suggest that faculty provide accommodations. Most faculty are accommodating in these circumstances. Junior faculty would benefit the most from understanding the culture at WPI and having guidance on how to effectively navigate these situations. Previous and current discussions with students show a balanced view on what students would appreciate in achieving a reasonable resolution to deadlines in emergency situations. A set of guidelines should include the pros and cons of various guidelines for different class sizes and learning settings. CAP would like to draft a motion for discussion in the new Academic Year. Paula suggests that we distinguish between accommodations related to flexibility and accommodations for disabilities.
3. B. Calli briefly shared the results of the CAP grading survey.
4. The meeting adjourned at 11:50 am

Respectfully submitted by D-Term Secretary F. Levey