Educational Policy Committee  
Annual Report, 2018–2019

This year, EPC’s main task was faculty advising for undeclared undergraduates (see further below), but we brought several other proposals before the faculty and consulted with various groups on other issues.

We brought the following proposals before the faculty:

- Change the drop-without-record for first-years in the second term to week 5, the same as for upper-class students, as recommended by the Mental Health Task Force (12 September 2018)
- Change the withdraw date (W grade) from the last day of classes to the end of week 10, the same as the pass/fail deadline, also recommended by MHTF (12 September 2018)
- Allow students in the A&S–SMFA combined degree program to have only a secondary major within the BA or BS, letting the BFA degree take the place of the primary A&S major (28 November 2018)
- Reduce the residence requirement for the A&S–SMFA combined degree from 10 semesters to 8, as recommended by the SMFA faculty (27 March 2019)
- Drop the “NR” (no record of enrollment) grade from the Bulletin (27 March 2019)

We accomplished the following smaller things that we judged did not require a vote of the full faculty:

- Endorsed the creation of a winter term and asked the Registrar to implement it in SIS, at the request of the Deans.
- Reviewed the changes to the academic integrity policy proposed by the Committee on Student Life and the office of student affairs; aside from one technical edit, we endorsed their proposal.
- Approved policies around the new Civic Semester program (the service-learning semester, sort of a “1/2 + 3 1/2” analogue to the existing “1 + 4” program. Very little was required of us here; most of the actual work is being done by the Committee on Curricula.
- Gave preliminary approval to the Courses At Tufts initiative from University College, with some reservations. The proposal is modelled on the existing GCAP program, but extended to undergraduate classes as well; many of the proposed policies are similar to those of the existing summer term. We felt that some things that work in the summer, where most of the students in class are not regular Tufts students, might not work as well for visiting students sitting in on our undergraduate classes during the school year. For example, the original proposal would have required a GPA of 2.75 in any prior college work; we felt this was far too low, and could bring in students who wouldn’t be able to keep up with the work. We were also concerned that, in pursuit of revenues, departments (or individual faculty) might feel pressured to open up seats in courses when they would prefer not to bring in visitors. We raised various questions about what facilities visiting students would have access to: while we all liked the idea of selling them access to the gym, we were quite concerned about whether these visiting students would place demands on tutoring, the Academic Resource Center, and Accessibility Services. Who would fill the role of Alpha Dean for these students, for example to mediate grade disputes, or to hear concerns from faculty about a student missing classes? We were also not sure about registration dates; the proposal
suggests that registration for Courses At Tufts could begin 1 June, but we observed that students may change their schedules significantly between then and the last add date in September. (New first-years will not have registered by then, of course, but this program is designed not to include courses that they are likely to take.) Although we had some concerns, we decided that as long as departments have control of which courses are available to visiting students, and departments’ participation is entirely voluntary, we could give preliminary approval without requiring a vote of the AS&E faculty. We will help University College review the parts of this program that affect undergraduates, as it gets under way in fall 2019.

- Consulted with the University Chaplaincy about the possibility of instituting a Friday noon open block for Muslim weekly prayers. The Committee observed that our existing open blocks are not actually kept open — recitations, exams, and even some actual class meetings happen then. We were thus not sure whether putting a third open block into the schedule would actually guarantee that students would have that time free. We decided to recommend that departments not schedule “irreplaceable” meetings (the only section of a class, a mandatory exam) in the Friday noon block, and will take this recommendation to the faculty in the fall. Meanwhile we will consider whether a third open block could be implemented; for example, we might present it as a weekly quiet period, for meditation or relaxing, for the entire community.

- Asked the Alpha Deans to enforce the actual policy about the foreign language requirement. Somehow the folklore had grown up that anyone who takes the TOEFL is exempt from both parts of the requirement. This was never true; simply being a non-native speaker has never been sufficient for exemption.

- Asked the Registrar to adjust the final exam schedule to allow all sections of French 22 to have their exams at the same time.

- Asked the Bookstore not to list commercial answer keys as “recommended” on textbook lists; this decision had come from their corporate offices, and local Tufts Bookstore staff fixed the problem immediately when we brought it to their attention.

We spent most of our time discussing pre-major advising, especially but not exclusively for A&S students. We had been asked by the Deans of Academic Affairs in A&S to work on getting more faculty doing advising, particularly offering advising classes (as opposed to host advising). To that end, we surveyed the faculty to figure out what some of the frustrations and barriers were.

By mid-fall it was clear that the most useful thing we could do was integrate students’ selection of their advising courses with the selection of the rest of their fall schedule, or at least with their initial design for what they plan to take. (Students’ initial schedules can be quite unrealistic, since they don’t always understand course numbers, or why it’s not a good idea to take two lab sciences in the first term, or other such things. Students don’t actually know what they’ll be taking until they’ve talked to their advisors and attended the first two or three meetings of the courses they’re considering. Still, their initial estimate, call it a fantasy schedule perhaps, does give a general sense of what they are interested in.)

So we suggested that students should pre-register for proposed classes, including an advising class, early in the summer. This was not intended to be actual, final registration, just a slightly more formal mechanism than “put everything you’re considering into your shopping cart.” Students would then be properly registered into the advising classes they chose, and assigned to advisors accordingly. To make this work, host advising would also have to be connected to classes, so that faculty who choose host advising would be affiliated with other classes in their department. For example, perhaps the person teaching CLS 75, Classical Mythology, isn’t taking advisees herself this year, but two other members of the department are willing to take 10 students each; then 20 seats in CLS 75 would be reserved for advisees, and the students who sign up for the class would be assigned to the affiliated faculty
members. We have come to call this Affiliate Advising, and we have asked student affairs to drop the misleading term “individualized advising.”

I presented this model to the A&S department chairs in November, and attended a meeting of the Deans’ Council in December; I also spoke on advising to the AS&E faculty in December and February. EPC surveyed the A&S faculty about experiences with pre-major advising, and this was part of my report to the faculty in December.

Somehow, by the beginning of the spring semester, a decision was made — it’s still not clear who decided this — that incoming first-years should actually register for classes over the summer, and only be assigned to faculty advisors after that, to meet with them for the first time at orientation. EPC participated in discussions with the Executive Committee, the new Committee on Advising, student affairs staff, and a broad assortment of deans around this decision, and finally got it rescinded. The Executive Committee called a meeting early in April at which faculty made it clear that summer registration, as conceived at that time, would not work: the faculty insisted that students must talk to their advisors before registration. Moreover, no one had figured out how to handle placement tests for those modern languages that require oral interviews. And the faculty felt that this decision had been handed down from on high, without consultation. (I admit that faculty have been known to feel that way whether it’s true or not, but this time that really does seem to be what happened.)

The net result, though, was widespread confusion among the faculty, and in mid-May fewer faculty have signed up to be advisors than in past years. EPC and the new Advising Committee will need to co-ordinate efforts in the coming year. There are some benefits to being able to estimate fall enrollment numbers sooner than we can now, and we still insist on integrating the selection of an advising course with the selection of the rest of a student’s schedule, so some sort of summer pre-registration does seem useful, if we can figure out how to do it without harming faculty advising.

Respectfully submitted,
Anne Mahoney, chair,
for the Committee