

## 1. DISCUSSION ON CREDIT HOUR POLICY WITH MARIN CLARKBERG

Marin Clarkberg, Director of Institutional Research and Planning: "I'm representing this issue to you today in my capacity as the accreditation liaison officer for the university, and that's how this came to my attention. What I want to bring to your attention today is the issue of credit hour, having a credit hour policy and, in particular, the consistency of the credit hour policy for the university.

"The federal government, U.S. Department of Education, has asked all universities to have a consistent credit hour policy. That legislation came out in 2011. I can talk about sort of the regulatory framework, the compliance issues. Again, that's my orientation on this issue.

"There are at least two other ways that we could think about credit hour policy and credit hour consistency as mattering, when is that from the student experience, when students look at courses that are three credits and four credits and don't understand the difference between in terms of workload and expectations. Another issue to consider might be the budget model, because credit hours do enter into the budget model.

"So the university has a policy. The policy is shared on the registrar's web site, and it was circulated with the information for today's meeting. It is a very bare bones policy, and it complies with the Department of Education policy. And basically it says one credit hour is assigned for meeting 50 minutes per week in a 15-week semester, like we have. Three-credit course would be one that meets for three 50-minute hours, and so forth.

"In a quick look at the -- this is the very bare bones policies. The different colleges, not surprisingly, have different internal policies. A quick look at courses across the university would suggest that they are very different policies. The modal course, for example, in Arts and Sciences is a four-credit course. The modal course that meets for three 50-minute sessions each week in Arts and Sciences is a four-credit course.

"There do appear to be differences. I'm not really in the position to do the internal in-depth look and audit of what is going on in terms of credit hour policies and consistencies, but I'm bringing this to the faculty senate to see if there's interest in the senate taking up that issue. The Educational Policies Committee has discussed it. I am not on that, and I don't know who represents it.

"Do you guys want to say anything about it? Or how do we run this?"

Speaker Lewenstein: "So we'll now open it for discussion, and I'll start by asking someone from EPC to comment."

Professor Robert Thorne, Department of Physics: "I'm Bob Thorne."

Professor David Pizarro, Department of Psychology: "We're basically here to say, to let everybody know that the EPC has been discussing this and we want to involve the senate. We're here really just for that information and to facilitate discussion. And if we can answer any questions about how our discussions have been going, then great; but I think the issues have been outlined well, so we should open it up."

"Professor John Brady, Department of Food Science: "Did you say there was federal legislation about this? And if so, I'm sorry to say I'm very ignorant of this. Could you just say a little about why they have any say in what we do in this regard and what their interest in that is?"

Marin Clarkberg: "Yes. Their letter starts out by saying they give out \$150 billion in federal financial aid."

(LAUGHTER)

Professor Pizarro: "I would like to follow up on that, because I don't know; will it get cut if we are not consistent? I mean, is there real danger? Has there been precedent it will get cut? Is this something that is pressing for that reason?"

Marin Clarkberg: "I think probably not. So again, I think there are multiple reasons why we would want to have a consistent credit hour policy. I'm representing this as our liaison to Middle States, which is the organization that accredits the university. They are the middle-man here. They have been asked by the federal government to enforce our compliance.

"So where it would come up would be additional work required of us, from our accrediting body. And again, accreditation is also part of this financial aid bit of receiving federal dollars."

Provost Michael Kotlikoff: "I'd just point out the president signs off on the compliance of the university associated with our accreditation by Middle States. So the president is assuring our accrediting body that we are in compliance. And in fact, there is some doubt that we are in compliance."

“Professor Brown: “I have been thinking about this for a while and noticed there is a wide discrepancy in student contact hours and credits. For example, I have nine student contact hours for a four-credit course. There are four-credit courses and other courses on campus that may be just one or two meetings for four credits. And it seems to be all over the board.

“I mean, our students do as much reading, as much preparation, we spend as much time doing consultation of students and so on. There's no difference there per credit. And it never really bothered me, because how the different colleges run their shops is probably none of my business.

“Where it started bothering me was that rather than -- under the new budget model, rather than supporting teaching according to student contact hours, they are requiring student credit hours. So rather than just being aha, I wonder what that was sort of thing between the various colleges and fields, it's become actually a point of concern in terms of the equity of the new budget model.

“Should it be student credit hours, should it be student contact hours, some hybrid -- you are on that committee. I'm glad I'm not. It must be really hard to figure that stuff out, but I think we are way, way in some places not compliant, and other places we are. And I just have the question that what are we going to do about it.

“Professor Pizarro: “I'm in Arts and Sciences, and we teach courses that meet three hours a week and get four credits, as you can see from the data very nicely; thank you. And I think there's some ambiguity. One is should we change -- should we all adopt a common policy.

“Another one is, and what I read as some ambiguity in the interpretation of what it means, for instance, the Department of Education says one 50-minute hour of classroom or direct faculty instruction. And so does that mean meeting? I think a lot of people read this as a course that meets three times a week for one hour or 50 minutes is a three-credit course; but in some, for instance, courses, there's a lot of writing and feedback given from that writing.

“So now, if I meet an hour each week for writing assignment, is that the contact hour that would make my course worth four credits? Or should it be -- I think this is unclear, and do we want -- one of the questions I have is, for Arts and Science, where we don't seem to have the same standard, do we have reasons to fight for keeping that ambiguity, or should we all -- is it more prudent to adopt something that we all agree on and enforce it across the board?”

Marin Clarkberg: "If I could comment, I think Middle States and even in the legislation is they are not very rigid and mechanical. They do have a rigid and mechanical framework for thinking about it, but we can write a policy that says other things in it.

"For example, some institutions give one credit, where we give four. It's not called a credit hour. It is a different kind of mechanism. That's fine, but we need to write it down, articulate it and say that we are looking at it and we assess whether we do an audit, you know, periodically assess that this is applied consistently and fairly across the institution."

Unidentified Speaker: "And just one other comment, that we should also -- Arts and Sciences, for example, might be out of line in some ways with other departments here, but it may be completely in line in how it assigns credits with Arts and Science colleges across the country. And that is something that seems like might be worth considering as well."

Professor Cynthia Bowman, Law School: "This is kind of a follow-up on that. I've taught at a number of institutions and never taught at one where you got four credits for three contact hours, three classes a week, if they are all 50-minute classes.

"And so I'm wondering how did this start, and what was the purpose? Because it does seem as though students could then take fewer classes over the course of the semester because of how they add up; to say nothing of the credit that professors get for teaching. And I'm just curious as to why you would defend that policy in Arts and Sciences. That's you, right? You're Arts and Sciences?"

Professor Pizarro: "I'm not -- I'm here to facilitate the discussion, so there might be people here who want to defend, but I guess I'll reiterate that contact hour and meeting time are not the same thing, and so -- what's that?"

"They are not three credit hours in the --

(Comment off mic.)

"So the question is, if you do routinely meet with students one hour every week, giving them feedback on their writing, I guess does that count or not. And should we have language that is stricter."

Professor Michael Fontaine, Classics: "I just want to convey an opinion I have heard -- I don't know if it's true -- in Arts and Sciences, that we will penalize our students

applying to graduate school if we give fewer credits for the seminars and things they take at the upper level. I have no idea whether that's true, but I have heard that from people."

Professor Brian Chabot, Ecology and Evolutionary Biology: "To add a little bit to the complexity of this situation, the curriculum committees in the colleges are the gatekeepers over whatever the college policy is. And in Agriculture and Life Sciences, we have been following the SUNY guidelines for this matter, which I think are pretty much the same as the New York State guidelines. They have more detail than you shared, as you may know, about different kinds of courses and how to allocate credit.

"So a couple of years ago, the curriculum committee in this college decided that the arts accreditation policy was out of compliance, so we stopped accepting for cross-listing courses that had four credits, where three credits was the calculus. So we have this kind of tyranny or whatever going on within the institution.

"I have another point, and that is that these guidelines do allow for exceptions, so one of the issues we have been wrestling with in the college is by what evidence do we accept exceptions to when a faculty member wants to award more credit than the class meeting time would allow; what evidence do we need to allow that to happen.

Professor Mike Thompson, Material Science: "I would say this is also an issue for the students in terms of fairness, that they perceive it very unfair, the amount of work they put in, and they will receive three credit hours from even a department within the same college, compared to less work and higher credits. And we need to reflect that.

"The other is there are objective data, at least in the engineering colleges, the students in their survey at the end of the semester fill out the number of hours they perceive they spent on the courses, and that could and should be reviewed to reflect how that matches into this number."

Provost Kotlikoff: "So if I could make a suggestion. This is a matter of educational policy that does affect more than one school, and so I think it's under the purview of the faculty senate, but I do think it's an issue that has existed for a long period of time and there's not a clear mechanism by which we go forward here.

"So the suggestion that I would have would be that we ask to do an audit, and there are exceptions that allow four credits for an extraordinary amount of work, out-of-class meeting, et cetera; but we do an audit and ask for the rationale behind credits given beyond the obvious policy.

“That would give us some scope of the problem, and then allow us to take the next step, which would be to craft a policy that is university-wide and allows us to come into compliance with state and federal law.”

Professor Pizarro: “I just wanted to address quickly, Professor Kotlikoff, I'm not sure that we even need an audit. I understand that would be a lot of information-gathering, but we have a lot of data and, as Arts and Sciences, I already can tell you that we don't comply in -- if by compliance we mean the stricter three credit hours, three hours of class time.

“And so the problem is there, and it's more a matter of just custom for our seminars; for instance, in psychology, we meet for one three-hour session, but we get four credits because we just assume we are giving them a lot of reading and that's just the culture of the way we are doing things. So if the audit would be to find out if there's a problem, there's a problem.”

Provost Kotlikoff: “I agree, but part of the problem is the rationale that I hear for the four credits in many cases is this additional work. And I don't think we want to constrain our courses in a way in which we say everything has to fit into one cookie cutter mold. So that's the only reason I suggest this audit, because I hear so often well, I'm giving four credits because of X or Y.”

Professor Thonney: “I object to more audits. We have plenty of audits at Cornell, more than we need, and this is just going to create more work for more administrators, which we definitely do not need.”

Professor Risa Lieberwitz, ILR: “So I think it would be useful to hear what the plans are for the EPC in terms of how you are thinking about addressing this. And obviously, that may change as you do things, but that would be useful.

“The other thing is, and I wanted to emphasize what I thought I heard Dan Brown saying, which was this issue of credit hours; seems to me that we shouldn't look at it as kind of a technical idea of how do we add up hours. The question is what are we trying to achieve and what are the consequences of choosing one route as opposed to another one.

“What are the underlying standards that we are trying to promote, which I think is in our discussion, but gets kind of lost sometimes when we start to talk about audits and

adding numbers. So I wonder if you could talk about that with regard to what the committee wants to do.

“Then my reading of the Department of Education definition is that it is more flexible than what we use here, and so is your committee going to consider that question of whether the flexibility in terms of equivalence of work might be good to add, as opposed to just the question of numbers in relation to class time or whatever?”

Professor Pizarro: “Risa, there's a lot in your question that I think should be addressed. The simple answer is that our first step was to come here and hear what you all had to say about this, because we're sort of starting from a point of really trying to gather information. That's why this has been so helpful.

“I think the sentiment is, and maybe we can tease two things apart here; one, should there be a policy, whether broadly written or constrained, that applies to the whole college, and then we could worry about enforcement and compliance. But as it is now, there is no such thing that we all can appeal to, as flexible as it might be.

“And so I think that some people on the EPC think that in particular Arts and Sciences and ILR are the odd people out here and that we might just try to adopt a university-wide policy. How flexible that policy is may be just constrained by how flexible Middle States is.

“But there's a second goal which somebody eluded to, which is fairness. And there are a few issues of fairness, not just a budget model and students who feel like they've been sort of cheated, but also there are many cases in which, for instance, our majors have to take a statistics course.

“I don't know if this is the case for statistics, but it could very well be that we say there are five or six courses on campus that would count as statistics. One of them is in a college that gives three credits and one of them is a college that gives four credits.

“And to decide on that basis doesn't seem fair, for a variety of reasons. To the professor, for instance, it might not be fair. If there are reasons for that being four, maybe it would be a disincentive, it's more work, then it would be incentive for the student just to take the four -- so I think it is more than just getting -- the big question is should we all get something that adheres to the guidelines from the government.

“And the second question is what would that look like. And we have good reason to do it, even without those compliance or regulations.”

Professor Thorne: "And there are lots of other things besides credit hours that are assigned to courses that affect students' choice and allocation of resources. Median grades in courses have a huge impact on student enrollment and allocation of resources. So this is just one part of a pretty big puzzle, I think."

Speaker Lewenstein: "Time for one last question."

Professor Paul Velleman, ILR: "Since you brought up my course -- I teach the large introductory stat course in ILR. And in fact, it was a three-credit course when I first taught it. We expanded it to a four-credit course and added material to it, so it now covers multiple regression analysis, a variance number of things not covered by some of the three-credit courses that do introductory statistics. So that's a sort of issue to be concerned with."

"I would also question, though, part of what we do is issue degrees, we award degrees, which depend on some number of credits earned. We could just cut everybody's course credit by 25% and require 25% fewer credits to graduate and it wouldn't change anything. So we have to look at the overall scheme."

Professor Pizarro: "I think a good way to proceed is to take your feedback. Please feel free to e-mail one of the members of the EPC committee if you have any more detailed feedback, and we'll go to EPC in the hopes of proposing whether it's an audit or whether it's a --"

Speaker Lewenstein: "One suggestion that's been made is that we ask for a sense of the senate as to whether we should have an audit. Anybody like to call for such a --"

Provost Kotlikoff: "I think the use of the term "audit" is probably problematic."

(LAUGHTER)

"What I was really asking for is a rationale for offering four credits and an evaluation of those rationales."

Professor Pizarro: "I will say right now maybe what we want is to actually talk to the people who are offering four-credit courses, rather than do a blanket thing. I was talking to a member of my department, and he said honestly, I took over this course. It was four credits before. I thought that would be kind of a blank move for me to make it to three credits. So he kept it that way, and he has no rationale. So in some cases, zero rationale."



Speaker Lewenstein: "The question is, is there a sense of the senate -- we should ask, is there a move for a sense of the senate as to whether some systematic data-gathering might be done.

"Moved. Second.

"All those who think that there should be some systematic data-gathering on this issue, raise your hands, please.

"Opposed?

"Abstain?

"The sense of the senate is that there should be some systematic data-gathering. There are perhaps a third who either voted no or abstained. Thank you very much."