

Background:

On Tuesday, March 4th, 2014, the Communication Concentration at Hamilton College was discontinued by a majority vote of the college's faculty. Earlier this year, Dean of Faculty Patrick Reynolds elected to cancel the Communication Department's third faculty position, leaving the department with only two full time equivalent faculty members (FTEs).

After unsuccessfully lobbying the Dean's Office for the Communication Department to keep its third faculty position, the Communication Department Chair, Professor Catherine Phelan, agreed to propose the closure of the Communication Concentration to new concentrators, beginning with the Class of 2018. The Dean of Faculty modified this proposal to begin with the Class of 2017 and accepted Professor Phelan's request to allow the Communication Department to retain its third faculty position until the graduation of the department's currently declared concentrators.

As a point of notice, members of the Class of 2017 who entered the college and took courses with the intent to declare a concentration in communication will not be allowed to do so. Members of the Class of 2017 have written Hamilton College President Joan Hinde Stewart to request that the faculty be urged to reconsider their decision to prevent members of the Class of 2017 from declaring a concentration in communication.

As of 2012, the Communication Department has averaged 14.7 concentrators per class year (or 7.34 concentrators per FTE), indicating a strong level of student interest in the concentration. The Communication Department currently boasts the highest concentrator-to-FTE ratio at Hamilton College, whereas the average department at Hamilton sees only 2.8 concentrators per FTE.

During the March 4th, 2014 faculty meeting, the Committee on Academic Policy made clear that the Communication Concentration was being recommended for closure due to current constraints on college resources and what the committee referred to as the department's "lack of curricular merit." The Committee on Academic Policy further acknowledged that student interest in the Communication Concentration was not a factor of consideration in the committee's recommendation to close the concentration.

There are currently no guidelines or standardized procedures in place at Hamilton College to evaluate a concentration's level of "curricular merit", and the Communication Concentration was never subjected to a formal evaluation in order to assess its level of "curricular merit."

Resolution:

RESOLVED, that this Student Assembly supports academic diversity at Hamilton College, both in terms of course offerings and academic concentrations.

RESOLVED, that student interest in individual courses and entire concentrations should play a role as one of many factors in the allocation of academic resources by the Office of the Dean of Faculty and the Committee on Academic Policy.

RESOLVED, that departments which serve a significant number of concentrators with a minimal allocation of academic resources should be applauded, and not penalized, for their efforts and efficiency.

RESOLVED, that subjective judgments of "curricular merit" should not be used as a determinant of academic resource allocation until such a time as the Office of the Dean of Faculty or the Committee on Academic Policy creates and publishes a set of formal, standardized criteria for assessing curricular merit.

Finally, this Student Assembly extends its gratitude to Communication Department Chair Professor Catherine Phelan for her dedication to her students and to the Communication Concentration, which she has led for the past decade.