Dean Carolyn Dever called the meeting to order at 4:12 p.m. in Wilson Hall 103. Approximately 50 faculty members were in attendance.

1. Approval of the Minutes of the Faculty Meeting of November 16, 2010.

There were no comments or questions, and the Minutes were approved.

2. Review of the Minutes of the Faculty Council meeting of November 30, 2010.

There were no comments or questions.

3. Executive Motion Calendar.

From the Committee on Academic Standards and Procedures: Proposed 24-credit rule for A&S non-interdisciplinary majors. CASP recommended that “the following sentence be added to the end of the first paragraph under ‘Major Field’ on p. 70 of the Undergraduate Catalog: ‘Each major must include at least 24 credit hours that are being counted solely toward the major.’ It should be noted that adoption of this rule would apply also to students who combine an interdisciplinary major with a non-interdisciplinary major.” The A&S Faculty Council recommends that the A&S faculty approve this proposal.

Professor Eakin, Chair of Council, explained that the CASP recommendation is part of a multi-year process of reviewing and updating A&S college-wide policies regarding academic major requirements. A few years ago, for instance, A&S changed its regulations such that A&S students were permitted to double major in a field of concentration offered by another Vanderbilt undergraduate school. The background to this particular recommendation, he continued, is that CASP originally proposed last year to limit the number of credits that could be double-counted between two A&S non-interdisciplinary majors to six, extending the existing six-credit double-counting limitation between an interdisciplinary major and a non-interdisciplinary major. The A&S faculty, however, did not approve this recommendation and requested that CASP reconsider the issue. CASP did so this fall and has recommended that a “floor” be established such that a minimum number of “unique” hours must be earned to satisfy each major, instead of establishing a limit on the amount of credits that may be double-counted between majors.

Professor Stone objected to the proposal in principle. He argued that students should be granted a major for which they have completed all of the requirements, and the CASP
recommendation would prevent this in some cases. If a student has completed all of the major requirements, then s/he should be granted the major. Further, this proposal would restrict the faculty of a department from setting its own academic requirements.

In response to these objections, several faculty members pointed out that A&S already has a rule that students cannot double-count more than six credits between an interdisciplinary major and a non-interdisciplinary major; this recommendation complements the existing rule. Further, departmental faculties cannot establish or even revise their majors on their own. Academic programs and revisions thereof have to be approved by the Committee on Educational Programs (CEP) and the college faculty as a whole. Before earning a major, moreover, students have to complete college-wide requirements as well, such as the degree requirements and the general education curriculum (AXLE). As one faculty member stated, the college, not the individual department, awards degrees.

Some faculty members of the Mathematics department presented other objections to the proposal. They argued that some students who would have earned double majors in Economics and Mathematics under the present rules would not be able to do so under the CASP recommendation. Further, double majoring with Mathematics under the proposed recommendation would be even more difficult if other departments were to include more Mathematics courses in their major requirements, as they are permitted to do under the legislation approved last year that allows departments to require up to 48 credits. Some science departments in particular might decide to incorporate some or all of the “hidden” mathematics courses that are prerequisite to their major into their major requirements. Third, the choice of “24” as the number of unique credits that a student must earn in order to satisfy a major is arbitrary.

Other faculty members replied to these points in the following ways: First, they granted that some Economics/Mathematics double majors, under limited circumstances, would have to earn one more Mathematics credit under the proposed rule than under the present rules. Of the eighteen Economics/Mathematics double majors who have graduated in the last two years, however, all of them would have complied with the proposed recommendation, according to the A&S Registrar. Faculty Council, during its deliberation of this issue, suggested that if this recommendation were to be approved and an Economics/Mathematics double major is one Mathematics credit short of earning the two majors because of this rule, then s/he could take one more Mathematics course or petition the Administrative Committee. Second, Professor Eakin pointed out that no department has proposed to include more Mathematics courses in its major requirements since the approval of the 48-credit rule, and, if they did, the CEP would carefully consider the effects of such a revision on the Mathematics major, as is its obligation. No A&S major poses problems to double majoring with Mathematics in this way at the present time. Further, the new 48-credit limit for non-interdisciplinary majors, many faculty members simultaneously countered, was not intended to encourage departments to increase their major requirements. Finally, the choice of “24” was not arbitrary. Professor Becker, Chair of CASP, explained that the proposed recommendation was modeled on the present 15-credit rule for A&S minors, in which students have to earn 15.
unique credits in order to satisfy a minor. CASP proposes that students must earn 24 unique credits in order to fulfill a major, which is three courses more than that is required to fulfill a minor. Moreover, students could complete two majors within 48 credits. At the CASP committee meeting, members also found it problematic that, in some cases, it is easier to earn a second major than a minor. The proposed 24-credit rule would minimize, if not preclude, such anomalies. Therefore, CASP members had a reasonable justification for choosing the “24” credit threshold. Professor Weintraub agreed that 24 credits is a reasonable “floor” for a non-interdisciplinary major and stated that, if this proposal were to be approved, it might also be reasonable in some cases for a department to slightly revise its major requirements in order to take the new rule into account.

Some faculty members stated that double-counting credits between two majors is inherently problematic and, ideally, should be eliminated altogether. Professor Campbell argued, similarly, that earning a major means that a student has mastered a body of knowledge as defined by the faculty of that department, but if a student double-counts many courses between two majors, then the student has not mastered the body of knowledge in the second major and perhaps has not even mastered it at the level of a minor.

Associate Dean Fränzile Bergquist questioned the last sentence of the CASP recommendation. The proposed 24-credit rule would apply only to non-interdisciplinary majors and therefore the last sentence should read something like, “It should be noted that adoption of this rule would apply also to the non-interdisciplinary major for those students who combine such a major with an interdisciplinary major.” Professor Becker, Chair of CASP, agreed that the proposal should be revised as Dean Bergquist recommended, and he interpreted her suggested revision as a friendly amendment to the proposal.

Some of the faculty members from Mathematics stated that the proposal would be acceptable if the words “solely” and “unique” were deleted from the rationale and recommendation. These qualifiers are what make the CASP recommendation problematic, they said. Professor Simonett suggested that, instead of the CASP recommendation, the A&S faculty could require double majors to take at least 24 or 27 credits from their home departments. Professor Cliffel, who is a member of CASP, concurred that the CASP wording is problematic, stating that the recommendation is not as clear as it could be. If this is the case, several faculty members remarked, perhaps it should be sent back to CASP for clarification. In response to these comments, Professor Baker moved to table the CASP recommendation. The motion to table the CASP recommendation was seconded and approved.

4. Presentation of the Outstanding Graduate Mentoring Awards in the College of Arts and Science.

Dean Dever and Associate Dean Russell McIntire presented Outstanding Graduate Mentoring Awards to Kathryn Schwarz, Associate Professor of English, in absentia, and John Lachs, Centennial Professor of Philosophy.
5. Presentation of the Outstanding Graduate Teaching Assistant Awards in the College of Arts and Science.

Dean Dever and Associate Dean Russell McIntire presented Outstanding Graduate Teaching Assistant Awards to Lily Claiborne, of the Department of Earth and Environmental Sciences, and Justin Fitzpatrick, of the Department of Mathematics.

6. Original Motion Calendar.

No issues were raised.

7. Good of the College.

Dean Dever encouraged all A&S faculty members to attend the January Faculty Meeting at which an update of Vanderbilt’s finances will be presented by Vice Chancellor Brett Sweet and Associate Vice Chancellor John McDaniel. The meeting is scheduled for Tuesday, January 25, at 4:10 p.m. in Wilson 103.

8. Adjournment.

The meeting adjourned at 5:00 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Kathryn H. Anderson,
Secretary of the Faculty