

**ACAS Report to Academic Council
May 6, 2019**

As a result of unanticipated departures from the college over the course of the year, the Advisory Committee on Academic Staffing was able to recommend approval of four tenure-track search requests for 2019-2020. These recommendations are:

Computer Science, 2 positions (open field)
Geosciences, 1 position (Solid Earth)
Studio Art, 1 position (Photography)

We also recommended moving forward the approved Mathematics search, slated to be undertaken in 2020-2021, to 2019-2020 (for a summary of all ACAS recommendations, see Appendix 1). The administration approved our four recommendations. Since our recommendations memo reached the Provost's Office, the administration received news of a fifth departure that was not projected in the staffing numbers for next year. In light of that, the President and Provost have decided to move up the Mathematics search by a year and use its previous "slot" for a yet-to-be-determined search in 2020-2021. That brings the search authorizations to five tenure-track searches for 2019-20 (in addition to the three already authorized for next year).

This report summarizes our activities over the past year and makes our case for ACAS's continued existence in its current form. We also present the results of the ACAS Survey and provide a summary of all ACAS recommendations since the committee's formation.

After three years of serving on the Advisory Committee for Academic Staffing, the faculty members of the committee unanimously recommend its continuation. We are convinced that the committee has given the faculty a strong voice in staffing decisions at the College. At a time when the Voluntary Retirement Program posed significant challenges for ensuring academic excellence, ACAS has enabled the faculty to engage in extended conversations with the Dean and Provost about the future of the curriculum. Faculty on the committee have weighed in on institutional priorities in an era of scarce resources and have focused on upholding curricular balance among the three academic divisions of the college.

In its three years of existence, the committee has created a framework for evaluating new tenure-track faculty hiring requests. As a result, the presence of ACAS has changed the hiring process from a discretionary activity that belonged solely to the Provost's Office and turned it into a thoughtful procedure for assessing hiring requests in consultation with departments and programs. There is a paper trail tracking which positions were recommended and explaining why others were not. In addition, ACAS has devised a structure for supporting joint hires (new legislation), articulated well-defined questions for departments and programs to address in their staffing requests, provided detailed feedback for those whose requests were not recommended, benchmarked Wellesley's staffing against that of peer institutions and national trends, and obtained five-year departmental outlooks to create a broader understanding of future curricular and staffing needs.

ACAS members believe that having a committee of Council that builds faculty expertise in departmental needs and changing curricular trends is valuable for shared governance at the College. ACAS should, therefore, continue to play an important role in the larger strategic planning process. Each year of our first three years has expanded our conception of how to plan. As we have gained experience on the committee, we have enlarged our scope, pushed back on the hiring cap, and tried to increase the number of tenure-track positions by negotiating with the administration. Just as serving on the CFA and Merit committees gives faculty an understanding of the process involved in those areas of crucial College decision-making, serving on ACAS allows faculty to grasp the challenges that the College faces in staffing departments as the size of the faculty has reduced and student needs and interests continue to evolve. As departments, interdisciplinary programs, and new academic initiatives arise, ACAS will play a useful centralizing role in strategizing and coordinating between multiple departmental and program needs.

As with any new committee, there has been a learning curve. We have implemented changes to ACAS's recusal policy after listening to our colleagues in Academic Council, especially regarding the concerns around bias, which we address in detail in an appended document. We have heard the suggestions and concerns expressed in the faculty survey (see Survey results below) and we have already implemented some changes as a result. We trust that our successors on ACAS will take up the suggestions they deem most useful, as they continue to assess which changes allow the committee to function most productively. Virtually all of our peer institutions have comparable committees that provide a formal mechanism for faculty to weigh in on tenure-track staffing decisions. Until ACAS was established, Wellesley was exceptional in not involving faculty in this important process.

In looking ahead, the current members of ACAS are working on several initiatives. The most pressing is urging the administration to reconsider how faculty on the Early Retirement Plan are counted against the College's cap on the number of tenure lines. Currently, each faculty member on the ERP is counted as a full tenure line. Counting them instead by their .5 teaching commitments would free up space under the cap, allowing ACAS to recommend more positions for approval. It would also more accurately reflect the College's academic staffing.

With the establishment of ACAS, Wellesley has for the first time provided a mechanism for faculty to have a voice in hiring decisions that will shape the future of the college and its curriculum. We urge the faculty not to vote to abolish their own voice in these decisions. The staffing process at the college has now approached the same level of transparency as our tenure promotion and merit processes. We are convinced that the public, collaborative, and self-determining nature of ACAS's work helps fulfill Wellesley's distinctive commitment to faculty governance.

Appendix 1: Previous requests considered by ACAS and those recommended to the provost (including TT lines authorized by provost outside of ACAS's regular review process *)

ACAS 2016-2017

Received 14 requests from:

American Studies, Biological Sciences (2), Chemistry, Cognitive and Linguistic Sciences, Computer Science (3), Economics, French, Neuroscience, Physics, Spanish, Women's and Gender Studies

Recommended and authorized by Provost to begin in 2018-2019:

Biological Sciences: Molecular Geneticist

Cognitive and Linguistic Sciences: Sociolinguist

Computer Science: open field

Physics: open field

Spanish: Golden Age Literature

*Computer Science: Open field

ACAS 2017-2018

Received 25 requests from:

Art (3), Biological Sciences, Chemistry, Cinema and Media Studies, Classical Studies, Computer Science (3), East Asian Languages and Cultures (2), Economics, Education, Environmental Studies, French, Geosciences, Italian Studies, Mathematics (2), Music, Political Science (3), Women's and Gender Studies

(**Voluntary Retirement Program: 34 faculty retired (20 tenured, 14 non-tenured)

In May 2018, the administration initially indicated that 6 searches, spread over two years, would be approved. ACAS argued that the planned 6 positions were not sufficient and negotiated with the administration for the authorization of 8 TT searches, over two years (with an additional 4 authorized by the provost*). The administration agreed with the caveat that these searches would occur over a three-year period from 2018-21:

Recommended and authorized by Provost to begin in 2019-20:

Art History: Islamic Medieval

Biological Sciences: Aquatic Ecology

Chemistry: Biochemistry/Organic

Political Science 1: American Politics

*American Studies--Mellon Bridge: Asian-American Studies

*Africana Studies: Social Science

Recommended and authorized by Provost for 2019-20, to begin in 2020-21:

*Jewish Studies, Open field

Political Science 1, comparative politics

French-Mellon Bridge: 19th-century studies

Recommended and authorized by Provost for 2020-21, to begin in 2021-22:

East Asian Languages and Cultures-Mellon Bridge: pre-modern Chinese literature

Mathematics: open field

*searches granted outside of ACAS's regular evaluation process

ACAS 2018-2019

Received 8 requests from:

Anthropology, Art, Cinema & Media Studies, Computer Science (3), Economics, Geosciences

Recommended and authorized by Provost to begin search in 2019-2020:

Computer Science (2)

Geosciences (1)

Studio Art (1)

Appendix 2

ACAS Survey Summary

Thank you to all who participated in the ACAS survey. There were 104 responses, but because not everyone answered all the questions, we report the total for each question separately. A number of broad themes that emerged from the survey responses are summarized below. We include the percentage of responses that alluded to those themes (in order of popularity of the themes).

What aspects of ACAS as it is currently constituted do you think are working well? (97 responses)

- Faculty voice: Faculty members remark that ACAS allows for more faculty input, that faculty have a broader understanding of the long-term needs of the college and that there is a faculty voice involved in long-term planning. (28%)
- Communication and transparency: Respondents mention the increased transparency and communication that ACAS allows and the clarity of how many positions are being requested that is now part of the process. (27%)
- Process (guidelines and guidance): Respondents remarked on the guidance and feedback provided to departments or programs making requests through a common process, the usefulness of the guidelines produced for departments and the efforts to foster joint appointments. (10%)
- Deliberative process: Faculty members point out that ACAS engages in a deliberative process with careful consideration of all requests. (9%)
- Diverse body: Respondents remarked that ACAS is a diverse body with representation from different areas of the college/ broad representation across disciplines. (9%)

Some responses that do not fall within the themes above were: 8% of the respondents did not find any positive aspect to remark upon; 7% were not sure, and 1% thought ACAS had positive aspects but was unsure about its procedures.

How might ACAS be improved? For example, would you propose changes to its charge and purview, its composition, its decisions processes, or its communication strategies? (82 responses)

- Changes to charge and purview: Faculty proposed ACAS should be working with a longer view; “working with a cap is too restrictive”; allowing more flexibility for cross- departmental hires and opportunistic hires; being more data-driven, looking at enrollments, numbers of majors and minors, looking at visiting committee reports; working more globally, not a one-by-one consideration of each request but a larger more long-term view (though one respondent mentioned that this could either be ACAS or another body); having more decision-making power; challenging the view of the Provost and having more interaction with the trustees. (33%)
- Changes to process (recusal): Faculty proposed developing better and more strict recusal policies; ensuring more transparency in the committee’s process; avoiding the appearance of bias and the occurrence of bias; resolving and responding to the issue raised about past biased decisions. (18%)
- No changes, instead respondents proposed that ACAS be dissolved and all future TT hires be authorized by the Provost’s Office. (16%)

- Changes to composition: Respondents proposed a different selection of members (other than the current process) but ensuring that there is broad representation and chosen by each group. (9%)
- Changes to process (communication): Faculty proposed having better information flow regarding the college's staffing goals and departmental goals; for ACAS to foster more inter-departmental communication and proposed that the committee should meet with departments that are submitting requests. (9%)

Some responses that do not fall in the themes mentioned above were: 4% proposed changes to ACAS process to ensure that all positions should go through the same process, none outside of it and ACAS should be involved in all; 3% proposed changes to the committee's process so that the discussion of ACAS and its role would be better timed, as it is too rushed and the committee is too new to decide; 1% proposed changes to the committee's process so that the group does not weigh-in on all, but only some TT requests.

Do you think ACAS, as it is currently constituted, should continue as a committee of Academic Council? (98 responses)

Yes: 47%

No: 45%

Yes, but with with a better recusal policy, or changes that ensure there is no appearance of bias (or bias), or but revisit after another period, or but with more decision-making power: 7%

No, with only a few positions it is senseless to keep it and it sends mixed messages because some positions are given by the provost: 2%.

Comments that came up but are not summarized above: Several colleagues (3) wished for opportunities for more in-depth conversations about what a liberal-arts education/degree means, and how to keep those goals in mind while undergoing a reduction in the size of the faculty. Some (2) expressed that those conversations should inform global staffing decisions rather than one-by-one authorization of TT lines.

Thank you again for participating in the survey.

Appendix 3

Responses to Concerns Raised by the Survey

A number of respondents to the ACAS survey expressed concern about the perception that committee members were biased in favor of their own departments. The current members of ACAS take these concerns seriously and would like to discuss them further in Academic Council. To open that discussion, we stress three points.

First, we think it would be wise to give ACAS a chance to address the perception of bias before concluding that the issue cannot be overcome. The current members, whose term on the committee ends this year, have already made its recusal policy even more rigorous than it was. New members can devise new policies, new kinds of outreach to faculty, and broader opportunities for sharing information with the faculty community. We note that other institutions have committees analogous to ACAS without a perception that bias has corrupted the process. ACAS is a very young committee here. We believe that in time, with a little patience from Academic Council, the committee can gain its full trust and confidence.

Second, we think ACAS's record is too short for Council to determine that bias has distorted the committee's judgments. Council has a small sample size to consider, too small for a decisive pattern to be detected. ACAS was formed at an exceptional moment, just when the Voluntary Retirement Program and the reduced target size for tenure-track faculty were announced. As a result, compelling hiring proposals were submitted by more departments and programs than the College could authorize. Several departments with which members are affiliated requested positions. In our judgment, these requests were exceptionally urgent. We still consider our recommendations reasonable and could explain them to Council in detail if our confidentiality policy allowed. More data in the future might reveal persistent patterns of bias, but we believe it's too soon to find such patterns now.

Finally, we stress that ACAS weighs a large, complex array of factors. An example might help evoke this complexity. In 2017-18, the College received the Mellon Bridge Grant, which funds new assistant professorships in the humanities when senior colleagues in the departments concerned have committed to retire in three years. Three departments that made hiring requests last year met the grant's criteria, and all three requests came to be approved; two of these were ones with which ACAS members were affiliated. We argued to the administration that it would be unwise for the College to leave money on the table as extreme financial pressures were reducing faculty FTE. Other contingencies—departments' sudden losses of faculty on the heels of foreseen departures, movements of faculty from already reduced departments to others at the College, etc.—made staffing emergencies our prime concern. We ask that faculty, in considering the question of ACAS bias, also try to imagine the full range of factors that motivated the committee's recommendations.