

TO: Academic Council
FROM: Advisory Committee on Academic Staffing (ACAS)
DATE: May 24, 2022
RE: ACAS Report to Academic Council

We report here the work of the Advisory Committee on Academic Staffing (ACAS) during the 2021-22 academic year.

This year's ACAS committee worked not only to review specific proposals for tenure-track searches, but also to provide broader advice to the Provost's office. We sought to be proactive in identifying college-wide needs in addition to responding to individual proposals. After several years in which the number of positions authorized by the administration could only accommodate departments with urgent requests, we wanted to branch out to recommend proposals that were important and consistent with the strategic plan, even if not as urgent.

In the fall, the Provost's office presented a proposal for a target-of-opportunity program to help diversify the faculty. ACAS was consulted about this program and the faculty members on ACAS expressed enthusiasm for it. Because the program was administered by the Provost's office, ACAS was informed about potential target-of-opportunity hires but did not participate in evaluating the requests.

The Provost also discussed the longer-term possibility of proposing specific areas of academic research and teaching as priorities for the College, and encouraging departments to craft proposals centered on those topics. The goal of this initiative would be to develop collaborative and cross-disciplinary concentrations on key areas of scholarship. Faculty members on ACAS supported this idea. We noted, however, that there are challenges to establishing interdisciplinary collaborations. One such challenge relates to joint hires. Although faculty are enthusiastic in theory about such hires, few are inclined to propose one for their own department/program. This reluctance may be due to the practical obstacles related to meeting the needs and expectations of each individual department. The committee encouraged the Provost's office to provide departments with clarity about the structure and nature of joint appointments and support in negotiating the competing needs of each department involved.

In a related vein, ACAS also discussed strengthening the presence of humanities faculty in interdepartmental programs. We noted the critical contributions that humanists make across disciplines and the valuable role that they could play in interdepartmental programs as well as in traditionally humanistic departments. The benefits of infusing humanities into those interdisciplinary programs that tend to be more social science oriented would be considerable and would help foster the interdisciplinary study between the humanities and social (and natural) sciences.

This year ACAS solicited two-page proposals with the expectation that we would be able to review them more efficiently and have time remaining to consider broader themes. We also hoped to lower the barrier for departments and programs to submit a proposal. The call for

proposals went out in November with a submission deadline in mid-January. During the interim, the committee offered departments the opportunity to meet with 2-3 members of ACAS. In these meetings, ACAS members described the process by which the committee would review proposals, and clarified points of confusion. The starting point for these conversations was typically the written feedback that the department/program had received from the prior year's ACAS committee. Because many things change in a year, including the membership of ACAS, we found the written feedback from a prior committee less useful than a conversation between department chairs and current ACAS members. We recommend that future committees adopt the latter approach.

ACAS received 21 proposals from 17 different departments and programs (listed in the appendix). The breakdown of these submissions by group is as follows:

Group A: 3

Group B: 9

Group C: 5

Our preliminary review of proposals and initial vote were completed before spring break. Subsequently, we divided the proposals into three groups: one group for which there was a strong consensus of support, a second group that received significant support but less consensus, and a third group for which there was less support. In our meetings after spring break, we did a further review of the proposals in the second group and we noted important factors that came into play in our evaluation of proposals. We urged the Provost's Office to consider all of these factors in their deliberations:

- Good interface with the strategic plan, with particular emphasis on inclusive excellence
- Evidence of a sustained effort to address diversity issues
- The need to address a critical gap in the department or college curriculum
- The presence of enrollment pressures
- The ratio of non-tenure-track faculty (particularly short-term visitors) to tenure-track faculty in the department/program
- The need to increase diversity in the department/program
- The need to reinvigorate a department/program that has long been without a new hire
- The need to support student research

In recent weeks we completed two more rounds of voting – one in which faculty members on ACAS identified their support for specific proposals in the first two groups, and the other to identify programs that fit into the themes listed above.

Our advice to the Provost's office includes the results of these three votes. Perhaps a more important component of our advice are the comments we made during hours of conversation. ACAS met 16 times this year as a full committee, and there were several additional faculty-only meetings. During the meetings of the full committee, the administrators mostly listened, and the faculty members on the committee had the opportunity to share our perspectives with each

other and with the administration. While we might suggest that ACAS meet a little less frequently next year, we greatly value the perspectives we gained in conversation with one another.

Taking our advice into consideration, the Provost's office has decided to authorize tenure-track searches in the following departments/programs. While several of these departments have had tenure-track searches in recent years, the current authorization does not mean that these departments are growing in size, but rather that there has been a departure or retirement since the last tenure-track search.

Searches in 2022-23:

Astronomy
Computer Science
Education
Neuroscience
Music
Physics
Political Science (2 searches in International Relations and American Politics)

Searches in 2023-24:

Anthropology
Chemistry
English
Women's and Gender Studies

ACAS did not provide the Provost's office with a specific list of proposals for which we recommended authorization -- instead, we provided them with the results of the three votes described above. All of the proposals for which there was a strong consensus of support were indeed authorized for searches. All of the proposals that were authorized received significant support with one exception: For Political Science, ACAS had supported one search and the Provost's office authorized two.

Voting members of ACAS, 2021-22

Rachid Aadnani, Middle Eastern Studies
Elena Creef, Women's and Gender Studies, MRHR representative
Carol Dougherty, Classical Studies
Nolan Flynn, Chemistry
Yoon Sun Lee, English and Creative Writing
Stella Kakavouli, Computer Science
Maggie Keane (co-chair), Psychology
Patrick McEwan, Economics
Ann Trenk (co-chair), Mathematics

Non-voting members of ACAS, 2021-22

Andrew Shennan, Provost

Michael Jeffries, Dean of Academic Affairs

Megan Nunez, Dean of Faculty Affairs

Ruth Frommer, Assistant Provost for Faculty Affairs

Appendix

The following departments/programs submitted requests for tenure-track searches in 2022-23:

Africana Studies

American Studies

Anthropology

Astronomy

Chemistry

Computer Science

Education

English and Creative Writing (2 proposals)

Environmental Studies

History

Medieval and Renaissance Studies

Music

Neuroscience

Physics

Political Science (4 proposals)

Psychology

Women's and Gender Studies