

ACAS Report to Academic Council May 26, 2020

Like other committees of Academic Council, the Advisory Committee on Academic Staffing had its work changed by this Spring's pandemic. The College's hiring freeze, announced on April 12 and in effect through December 2020, means that ACAS cannot recommend tenure-track searches for approval by the Provost as we would have done. Before the announcement, it was anticipated that there would likely be room under the tenure-eligible hiring cap for us to recommend three to five search approvals. The committee decided after the freeze was announced to complete our review and vote on the fifteen hiring requests we received, and then to identify the requests that we deemed most urgent in this report, for a few reasons.

First, we aim to give Academic Council and the Provost a sense of where ACAS now sees the most acute tenure-track staffing needs at the College. We stress that the committee sees many more needs than those indicated in the four requests at the top of our voting tally (see Appendix 1). All the requests we received described substantially beneficial contributions that new faculty would make to the curriculum. Nearly all were made in response to departures of tenure-eligible colleagues. But the 10% staffing reduction at the College continues to make it necessary for ACAS to discriminate among the levels of urgency in the staffing of departments and programs and convey what we have concluded to the faculty, whom we represent. Second, we wanted to give next year's ACAS a record of our vote. Only three of the current nine members will return to the committee in 2020-21. While our voting result is not binding, we think a public record of it will carry due weight when the committee can recommend search approvals again. Finally, we wanted to try a new practice of briefly offering our reasons for identifying some requests as particularly compelling (see Appendix 1). Members of Council have said they thought this innovation could be useful.

One final comment about the result of our vote. This year, the first in which our current recusal policy was really put to the test, we had an unusually high proportion of ACAS members, six of nine, whose home departments made hiring requests. In the interest of monitoring the issue of the committee's possible bias in favor of the departments of its members—a matter raised in Academic Council—we note that our top group of four requests includes one from an ACAS member's own department. The remaining group includes six requests from members' own departments. Appendix 1 notes committee members' departmental affiliations and their relation to the final vote tally; Appendix 2 is a copy of our recusal policy.

The committee's other work this year included, most importantly, our efforts to engage the faculty as a whole in discussions about our priorities in tenure-eligible staffing decisions and what they represent for the future of our academic program. We designed and administered a survey about hiring priorities early in Fall 2019 and twice attempted to lead discussions in Academic Council, creating a seating arrangement with post-it notes to encourage faculty from different divisions to talk together about their unique and their shared concerns and aspirations. In what can only be described as an unusual run of bad luck, the first conversation was forestalled, and the second cut short, due to lack of time in Academic Council. It will be up to the next membership of ACAS to decide how best to engage faculty in discussions of tenure-eligible staffing. The current hiring freeze will likely be a primary matter that ACAS and faculty may wish to discuss together. The question at the moment is not how to choose among many hiring requests in a context of limited resources, but how to cope with a situation, temporary as it surely is, in which there are no tenure-eligible staffing resources to allocate at all.

Throughout the year, the committee also reflected on matters pertaining to staffing that extend beyond single departments and programs and their hiring requests. For instance, before we began work on the Fall 2019 survey, we gathered data about enrollment pressures, challenges, and trends in every department and program of the College and thought about how best to weigh enrollments along with other factors when we make our recommendations for hiring approvals. We also began to consider the manner of teaching statistics at the College, a topic that ACAS will likely take up in the future. Several departments across the curriculum currently teach in this area, and ACAS can help them come together to do it as effectively and efficiently as possible. Our work with the survey and faculty outreach this year demonstrates that the natural time for ACAS to explore such broader questions is the Fall, before departments and programs have submitted hiring requests, and we urge future versions of the committee to use their time in the Fall to take up broad curricular questions and initiatives related to tenure-eligible staffing and the future of the academic program, in consultation with the faculty and Provost's office.

Appendix 1: Results of ACAS Voting, 2019-20

Top group of four requests (in descending order of vote tally)

* denotes recusal of ACAS member from deliberation and voting on case

1. Political Science, International Relations
 - one unanticipated departure this year in IR
 - one unanticipated announcement of imminent retirement in IR
 - one anticipated, imminent retirement in IR
 - high demand among students for IR courses
 - importance of IR in Political Science department, major, curriculum, etc.
2. Economics,* field open
 - one unanticipated departure late last year
 - additional reduction without replacement of 3 FTE of tenure-eligible teaching staff since 2014
 - high enrollment pressures, large number of majors, etc.
3. (tie)
 - a. Cinema and Media Studies, comparative media studies, global media industries, or digital humanities
 - retirement of two program co-directors two years ago
 - only 0.5 tenure-eligible FTE currently located in program
 - recent departure of a tenure-track faculty member without replacement
 - continuing student interest in CAMS
 - College need for viable CAMS program
 - b. Physics, field open
 - reduction in tenure-eligible staffing by 1 tenure-eligible FTE due to ERP
 - insufficient staffing for research experience for majors
 - reorganization of curriculum to more efficient “studio style” will be supported by tenure-track staffing
 - exceptionally successful measures in support of inclusive excellence, diversifying faculty

Requesting departments/programs not in above group (alphabetical)

* denotes recusal of ACAS member from deliberation and voting on case

- Anthropology, comparative global health
- Biological Sciences,* mammalian systems physiologist
- Chemistry,* interface of inorganic and organic chemistry
- Classical Studies,* Latinist
- Computer Science (2), fields open
- Mathematics (2),* #1, mathematics, field open; #2, statistics
- Music, music theorist and composer
- Neuroscience,* field open
- Women’s & Gender Studies*/Environmental Studies (joint appointment), gender, science and the environment

Voting members of ACAS, 2019-20

Elena Creef, Women's and Gender Studies, MRHR representative

Nick Doe, Chemistry

Carol Dougherty, Classical Studies

Kate Grandjean, History

Tom Hodge, Russian

Patrick McEwan, Economics

Jim Noggle (chair), English

Kaye Peterman, Biological Sciences

Ann Trenk, Mathematics

Appendix 2: Recusal Policy

Advisory Committee on Academic Staffing

Committee members will be excused from all discussion of staffing requests from departments or programs in which they have an appointment. Committee members from a department or program making a request will be excluded from voting on proposals from those departments or programs.

Committee members who believe they have a conflict of interest in deliberating over a staffing request will recuse themselves from all discussions and votes involving the request.

(revised 2-19-19)