

Advisory Committee on Academic Staffing Report on Recommendations for 2018-19

The Articles of Government stipulate that the Advisory Committee on Academic Staffing (ACAS) must report each year to Academic Council on its recommendations to the Provost regarding tenured and tenure-track staffing requests. We received 25 requests from 17 departments and programs this year, and we recommend to the Provost that the 8 tenure-track searches listed below be authorized. Our report will indicate how we arrived at this recommendation, describe the administration's response to it, and briefly consider the future of tenure-eligible staffing levels at the College.

Though ACAS has existed for only two years, committee members are experienced enough to feel confident that the challenges we faced in 2017-18 are exceptional. The Voluntary Retirement Program, announced by President Johnson in July 2017, affected both the timing and, more importantly, the scale of our work. The VRP ultimately yielded commitments from 34 faculty members (20 tenured, 14 long-term non-tenure-eligible) to retire, decisions finalized in late November. Since the delayed January staffing request deadline, the committee has known we would be assessing and discussing priorities among a body of requests, 25, nearly twice as large as last year's 14.

Reduction of the College's total staffing level is, of course, the purpose of the VRP. The committee worked knowing that the administration aimed to keep the College on a course to reduce the total size of the tenure-eligible faculty by around 10% from its historic 2015 high of 259 tenure-eligible FTE, to an FTE total in the low 230s. This corresponds to the planned 10% reduction of the College's curriculum. In this climate of austerity, committee members expected that the number of searches we would be told we could recommend for authorization would be small. Early estimates of that number mentioned by the Provost provoked gasps in the room. We were not, however, given a firm number until May 9, and this was even smaller than anticipated: 6 searches would be authorized, with the expectation that most would take place in 2018-19, with others pre-committed for 2019-20. These numbers were chosen, we learned, because they would immediately attain and likely preserve a staffing level around 231 FTE for tenure-eligible faculty, which the administration had set as its target. In this context, we note that the Provost's Office this year has already authorized three searches, in Africana Studies, American Studies (Asian American Studies position), and Jewish Studies, as well as approved a new hire in Computer Science, outside ACAS's normal review process, and that these four are included in the calculation of total tenure-eligible faculty as the College looks ahead.

The faculty members of ACAS do not think it is prudent to reduce the faculty so quickly. The retirements encouraged by the VRP do not follow a plan for the academic future of the College and instead result from accidents of faculty demographics. The number of searches initially authorized by the administration limited our ability to respond strategically to the VRP's unintended consequences. We believe that our recommended authorization of 8 searches, likely spread over two years as in the administration's initial plan, will afford the College at least some measure of flexibility to address the most serious curricular gaps and imbalances created by the VRP without significantly interrupting progress toward the administration's staffing goal. A memo we sent to the Provost on May 18 (and re-sent on May 24 with more information) argues for this recommendation and outlines a plan by which total tenure-eligible faculty FTE would peak at 234 in 2020-21, then gradually reduce over the following 3 years to 231. Our case was bolstered, we believe, by the College's reception of a Mellon Bridge Grant, which pays for three

new tenure-track faculty in the humanities for three years, in advance of coming retirements of three senior faculty. Our final recommendation included three humanities positions eligible for this grant's support, positions we believe are crucial to maintaining the quality of the curriculum as a whole.

On May 25, we learned that the administration has decided to authorize the 8 searches that we recommended. These searches, however, will not be spaced over two years, but rather over three: 4 in 2018-19 (plus 2 of the searches authorized by the Provost's office this year); 2 in 2019-20 (plus the third search authorized by the Provost's office this year); and finally 2 in 2020-21. As the Provost indicated to us, this does not necessarily mean that only these searches will proceed over these three years. But any additional searches will be contingent on additional departures of tenure-eligible faculty, not now known or anticipated, during that time. The administration's response to our recommendation accepts an important part of it. All 7 of the departments whose requests were approved now have assurance that their searches will proceed, some sooner, some later. But the administration's search plan will not allow the immediate, temporary rise in tenure-eligible faculty FTE above 231 in 2019-20 recommended by ACAS as a response to the VRP. The Provost's plan projects the following FTE totals of tenure-eligible faculty, assuming no unforeseen departures from the College: 231 in 2018-19; 230 in 2019-20; 233 in 2020-21; and 232 in 2021-22. The members of ACAS urge the administration to maintain these FTE levels, at a minimum, by authorizing at least as many new searches during this time as there are additional departures.

It is clear that faculty staffing in the coming years at the College will be extremely challenging. The current staffing needs of departments and programs at the College remain profound. Without exception, every one of the 25 requests submitted to us this year described a serious and thoughtfully considered staffing need. Nearly every one of them was made in response to the departure of at least one tenured or tenure-track faculty member from the department or program concerned. We expect that we will receive requests again next year from many departments and programs whose requests this year we did not recommend for authorization. New needs for tenure-track positions will inevitably arise. We as a faculty face a long, difficult process of adjustment to a reduced level of staffing at the College. Extending this year's commitments over the next three years will make responding to abiding and new staffing needs yet more difficult. Members of ACAS recommended only 2 tenure-track searches more than those initially authorized in part because we know that the College will need flexibility in hiring in coming years, to continue to diversify our faculty and curriculum, embrace innovations in our disciplines, and uphold our academic standards.

We cannot, for reasons of confidentiality, discuss details of our final decisions regarding particular cases, but we can describe the general factors that shaped these decisions. In response to so many departures, we retained a basic commitment to maintaining the academic functioning of departments and programs. We weighed enrollment pressures and considered how likely it was that a department or program could temporarily cover its curriculum with visiting instructors. We also viewed the College's curriculum as a whole, attending to the balance among academic divisions and general coverage of global regions, cultures, and historical periods. In all these considerations, we were mindful of the College's commitment to diversity.

The future of staffing at the College is a matter of deep and common concern among faculty. Therefore we propose a faculty-only meeting early next Fall to discuss it. In addition to details of ACAS's recommendation and the administration's response to it presented in this report, topics could include the College's potentially increasing reliance on temporary faculty to cover

departmental and program curricula, the role of joint appointments in addressing staffing shortfalls, the approval of tenure-track searches outside the normal review process of ACAS, the purposes and future of ACAS itself, and the best functions the committee could perform. Faculty members of ACAS represent the faculty to the administration in matters pertaining to staffing, and we think a meeting of this kind would help us do this job. Please email Jim Noggle (jnoggle@wellesley.edu) or the incoming chair of ACAS, H el ene Bilis (hbilis@wellesley.edu), to indicate your interest in and other thoughts about having such a meeting.

Recommended Searches (in alphabetical order):

Art: Art History
Biological Sciences
Chemistry
East Asian Languages and Cultures (1 of 2 requests)
French
Mathematics (1 of 2 requests)
Political Science (2 of 3 requests)

Not Recommended for 2018-19

Art: Studio Art (2 of 2 requests)
Cinema and Media Studies
Classical Studies
Computer Science (2 of 3 requests)*
East Asian Languages and Cultures (1 of 2 requests)
Economics
Education
Environmental Studies
Geosciences
Italian Studies
Mathematics (1 of 2 requests)
Music
Political Science (1 of 3 requests)
Women's and Gender Studies

*one Computer Science position was authorized outside normal ACAS review process