

COMMITTEE ON ACADEMIC FREEDOM AND RIGHTS (CAFR)
ANNUAL REPORT, 2022–2023

The Committee on Academic Freedom and Rights (CAFR) serves as the guardian of academic freedom and rights for all members of the Skidmore College community.

SUMMARY

During Academic Year (AY) 2022–2023, CAFR considered or was involved in consultations and governance matters, informal inquiries, and required training. Although our doctrine of confidentiality requires the withholding of certain details, the breakdown is as follows:

- Fall anti-bias literacy session with ATC and PC to support CAFR’s role in the tenure appeal process. No tenure appeals were lodged this year.
- Three formal consultations with the administration, one mandated by the *Faculty Handbook* (FHB), one regarding the President’s Speech and Expression on College Campuses event, and two to plan anti-bias training in AY22-23 and AY23-24.
- Participation in governance committee chairs meeting with three DOF/VPAA candidates.
- One formal consultation with a shared governance committee on a motion brought to the faculty floor.
- Two consultations with a working group.
- Two informal consultations with shared governance committees.
- Two shared governance meetings and two Committee of Committee meetings.
- Four informal inquiries initiated by faculty and one initiated by a student, none of which advanced to formal inquiries. An informal inquiry involves a complainant meeting with one or more CAFR members (often the whole committee) to gather information, discuss a complaint, or seek assistance or clarification. CAFR might engage in an informal investigative process or attempt to resolve the complaint informally via mediation.
- Two reports to the Assistant Director for Employment, Compliance, and Workforce Diversity (ADEWD).
- A special project researching ombuds/neutral observers at peer and aspirant colleges.

The work surrounding these issues required 47 meetings, with most involving a CAFR quorum (and usually all members). CAFR also delivered a report on academic freedom and rights to the Board of Trustees on May 18, 2023. While most of the work described above occurred between September and May, the CAFR Chair was consulted twice by administration, attended 3 meetings, and responded to one query from a faculty member in June and July 2022.

CAFR continued to use Zoom as the platform for conducting confidential meetings with complainants, respondents, and the administration. Whenever possible, CAFR will continue to advocate for meeting with

community members via Zoom (or a comparable platform), unless persuaded that an in-person meeting is in the interest of equity, inclusion, or similar considerations.

RECOMMENDATIONS TO DOF

Based on this year's work, CAFR makes the following recommendations to the DOF to strengthen the protection of academic freedom and rights:

1. DOF should prompt departments to review their personnel policies prior to deliberations on personnel cases.
2. DOF should prompt departments to discuss disciplinary standards for scholarship prior to deliberations on personnel cases.
3. DOF should provide guidance to CPDs and departments to standardize the role of the chair's letter/department letter across departments, and to standardize procedures for generating these letters.
4. DOF should formalize procedures and processes for faculty conversions and include those procedures in the *CPD Handbook*.

RECOMMENDATION TO FEC

Based on this year's work, CAFR makes the following recommendations to FEC:

1. Since CAFR work is aligned with ATC/PC (shared trainings, possibility of TRS in Spring), CAFR meetings should occur during designated time slots that overlap with ATC and this should be included in the information shared by FEC during election period.

SPECIAL PROJECT

Prompted by a previous informal inquiry and a survey of former CAFR chairs, CAFR continued a consideration of whether an ombuds or neutral observer might serve to strengthen the protection of academic rights and freedoms on campus. This year, CAFR gathered information on the presence or absence of ombuds at peers and aspirants and initiated an informal discussion with ATC.

Information gathered from institutional websites and with the assistance of the DOF/VPAA is summarized in **Table 1**. All of Skidmore's aspirants and just under half of Skidmore's peers have ombuds. Among the peer and aspirants that do have ombuds, the role ranges from external consultants to internal direct reports to the President. Many are recently established positions or offices. Some engage in listening and mediative work and do not conduct investigations, while others may serve an investigative role. In some cases, a single person occupies the role, while in others the role is occupied by multiple employees, and there may be a separate ombuds for faculty, staff, and students.

Rank	Institution	Ombuds
Aspirants	Wesleyan	yes
	Colby	yes
	Haverford	yes
	Middlebury	yes
	Bowdoin	yes
	Gettysburg	yes
	Oberlin	yes
	Wheaton	no
	Franklin & Marshall	no
	Dickinson	no
	Vassar	no
	Colgate	no
	Union	no
	Trinity	yes
	Bates	yes
	St. Lawrence	no
	Hamilton	no
	Kenyon	yes
	Connecticut	yes
	Bard	yes
Sarah Lawrence	no	
Peers	Barnard	yes
Other Northeast SLACs	Amherst	yes
	Bennington	no
	Hampshire	no
	Haverford	no
	Smith	yes
	Swarthmore	no
	Wellesley	yes
	Williams	yes

Table 1. Presence or absence of ombuds at Skidmore’s peers, aspirants, and other Northeast small liberal arts colleges.

SPECIAL PROJECT RECOMMENDATIONS

CAFR does not currently have a position on whether an ombudsperson would serve the needs of our community, but we think that it warrants further research and consideration. CAFR makes the following recommendations based on our research to date:

1. CAFR should continue research and information gathering about whether an ombuds role could bolster protections of academic rights and freedoms for community members.
2. CAFR should meet with the new DOF to discuss CAFR's role and function and to discuss the findings of the ombuds research.
3. Faculty should be directly involved in any consideration of adding an ombuds role.

Respectfully submitted,

Siobhan Hart, Chair of CAFR, 2022–2023

MEMBERSHIP

AY 2022–23

Fall: Siobhan Hart (CAFR Chair; Anthropology), Corey Freeman-Gallant (Biology), Kelly Melekis (Social Work), A.J. Schneller (Environmental Studies and Sciences, untenured at the time of election).

Spring: Siobhan Hart (CAFR Chair; Anthropology), Jess Sullivan (Psychology), David Cohen (Management and Business), A.J. Schneller (Environmental Studies and Sciences, untenured at the time of election).

Student representative: Emilka Jansen

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Fall: A.J. Schneller (CAFR Chair; Environmental Studies and Sciences, untenured at the time of election), David Cohen (Management and Business), Bill Lewis (Philosophy), Dan Nathan (American Studies)

Spring: A.J. Schneller (CAFR Chair; Environmental Studies and Sciences, untenured at the time of election), Kelly Melekis (Social Work), Bill Lewis (Philosophy), Dan Nathan (American Studies)

Student representative: To be appointed by SGA