

CAS Annual Report, 2008-2009

Members of CAS, 2008-2009:

Rachel Roe-Dale, Mathematics and Computer Science (Chair)
Kate Graney, Government
Sonia Silva, Anthropology, Sociology, and Social Work (Fall '08 replacement for
Tillman Nechtman)
Tillman Nechtman, History (Spring '09)
Beth DeBold '09, Student Representative (Fall '08)
Alison Shultz '09, Student Representative
Michael Ennis-McMillan, Dean of Studies
Ann Henderson, Registrar & Director of Institutional Research

Regular visitors (non-voting):

Laurie Baker, Academic Advisor in the Dean of Studies Office
David DeConno, Associate Registrar
Tina Breakell, Program Coordinator, Office of Off-Campus Study and Exchange

Summary of Activities

The Committee on Academic Standing (CAS) met weekly during the academic year, and held two Academic Review sessions, one on 10 January 2008 and a second on 28 May 2009. In addition the committee held a separate end-of-the-year Academic Review session for cases involving graduating seniors on 12 May 2009.

During its weekly meetings, the CAS heard petitions and requests from the offices of the Dean of Studies (DOS), the Registrar, and Off-Campus Study and Exchange (OCSE). In each case, the petitions brought before the CAS involved deviations from the college's established academic standards, and it was the committee's obligation to determine whether or not the petitions could be accommodated without compromising Skidmore's commitment to academic excellence.

In addition to the above responsibilities, this year's CAS addressed issues regarding the faculty vote to award college and departmental honors to August graduates, the Academic Grievance Policy, the major declaration timeframe, OCSE guidelines for GPA petitions, and the consideration of petitions from students with disabilities. These issues are described in more detail below.

- **College and departmental honors awarded to August graduates:** Last year CAS discussed and endorsed changing the procedure for reporting the names of August graduates who qualify for College Honors and Department and Program Honors. In 2008 the Dean of Studies, on behalf of CAS, presented candidates for August honors at the first faculty meeting in September. Voting on Honors in September rather than May for these students streamlines the awarding of diplomas and graduation honors to August graduates and reflects CAS policy conversation from the spring of 2008. August graduates will now receive their honors at the time of their graduation.

- **Academic Grievance Policy:** On behalf of CAS, Kate Graney participated in the subcommittee commissioned by CEPP to discuss academic grievance. Throughout the year CAS engaged in many discussions about this topic.
- **Major declaration timeframe:** In Fall 2008, approximately 25% of juniors had still neglected to declare a major. Skidmore policy states that students should declare their major by the end of their sophomore year. CAS discussed how to enforce this policy and concluded that in order to help enforce this policy more fully, students in the sophomore class will now have a hold put on their registrations for fall semester until they have declared a major. Some students may be able to receive a special waiver from the Registrar/ Dean of Studies to have their hold removed without declaring a major, but this extension will only apply until the end of the spring semester. The OCSE office added that in light of this new emphasis, its office will also require all sophomores who seek to go abroad in spring of their sophomore year to declare a major by October 15 of their sophomore year. This new change in procedure was implemented beginning in February 2009.
- **OCSE guidelines for GPA petitions:** To ensure fair representation of student GPA petitions to CAS and to simultaneously prevent CAS from hearing applications not likely to be approved, the CAS in consultant with OCSE reviewed and endorsed the document: *Policies and Procedures for Off-Campus Study GPA Petitions*. This document will be distributed by OCSE to students who intend to submit GPA petitions. In their petitions, CAS especially wants students to emphasize the connection between their study abroad experience and their major, minor, or other areas of academic interest in their personal statement. CAS also concluded there is no GPA cutoff for petitions, but CAS will typically not review a petition with a GPA lower than 2.7. This document is on file in the OCSE office and has been appended the CAS guidelines.
- **Review of personal leave justifications and regulations:** The committee discussed the application form currently used by the DOS for personal and medical leave. The applicants for both personal and medical leave will now be required to submit a more substantial statement about the reasons they are requesting a leave, whether it be personal or medical leave. The rationale for asking for an expanded personal statement is to help the DOS staff assist the students more effectively upon their return to campus, in the sense of making sure they have the support they need. CAS also agreed that returning students should specify a detailed academic plan. The DOS is currently revising these application forms and will bring the revised versions to CAS this fall for final approval.
- **Petitions from students with disabilities:** The CAS consulted with Salome Heyward, JD, about its policies and procedures in considering petitions from students with disabilities. Specifically the committee discussed student petitions requesting a third W from a class on the basis of a medical condition when the direct relationship between the medical condition and the class in question is not entirely clear and the institutional liability associated with such cases. Ms. Heyward noted that the Department of Education tends to defer to institutions and their policies, but also that it looks favorably

on institutions that have policies allowing considerations for “exceptional circumstances” and that as long as institutions give petitions full consideration (including, most importantly, having its own experts and specialists of commensurate rank evaluate medical opinions that students might submit on their own behalf), the institution tends to win these cases. Following this discussion, CAS agreed to invite Skidmore’s experts from Health Services, the Counseling Center, and SAS as necessary to offer insight to a student’s particular case and in evaluation of his/her medical documentation, with the understanding that these individuals would need to operate within the strictures of confidentiality commitments. CAS agreed that these individuals will not participate in CAS deliberations about the specific case.

- **FEC’s charge to examine faculty involvement:** At FEC’s request, CAS discussed faculty presence on CAS. Members of CAS were all in agreement that the three faculty seats on CAS were indeed of great importance, and that the committee does not recommend lowering the number of faculty on CAS. The general conclusion was that CAS falls into the category of “critical faculty committee,” and as such requires robust faculty representation.

The 2008-2009 CAS accomplished many of the items that were on its agenda for this year. Items which have been held over for the coming academic year include:

- A revision of the committee’s policies on personal leaves,
- A revision of the committee’s policies for readmitting students to the college who have previously been disqualified
- A review (and possible revision) of the committee’s policies for granting substitutions for all-college requirements.
- A review (and possible revision) of the committee’s policies on probation guidelines
- A review (and possible revision) of all college honors criteria

The composition of CAS for the 2009-2010 academic year will be:

- Kate Graney, Government, Chair
- Rachel Roe-Dale, Mathematics and Computer Science
- Daniel Swift, English
- Michael Ennis-McMillan, Dean of Studies
- Ann Henderson, Registrar and Director of Institutional Research
- Two students to be named by SGA

Respectfully submitted,
Rachel R. Roe-Dale, Department of Mathematics and Computer Science
Chair, Committee on Academic Standing