

Committee of Committees Meeting Notes

05/05/2025

Attendance:

Dominique Vuvan, Ting Li, Jeremy Day-O'Connell, and Murat Yildiz for FEC

Sarah DiPasquale for ATC

AJ Schneller for CAFR

Tim Wientzen for FDC

Nick Junkerman for CEPP

Maggie Greaves for CC

Greg Pfitzer for CAS

Masako Inamoto for CIGU

Daniel Peterson for AC

Joseph Cermatori for PHFC

Joowon Park for PC

Absent: Rodrigo Schneider for IPPC

Opening Remarks

The FEC Chair welcomed everyone and thanked them for attending the meeting. The Chair then invited each committee chair to report on their committee's activities during the spring semester and to announce the incoming chair for the upcoming academic year. Additionally, the FEC Chair reminded all committees that annual reports are due by the end of May.

1. Appointments and Tenure Committee (ATC)

The ATC Chair announced that Larry Jorgensen will serve as the incoming Chair.

Ongoing Discussions with President Conner: Conversations began this semester and will continue in the fall regarding the review of the President's Cabinet, which is a responsibility ATC is engaged in.

Tenure Review Materials: ATC partnered with Associate Dean throughout the academic year to consolidate and clarify materials related to the tenure review process. These resources are now available in a dedicated section of the DOF/VPAA website, making information more accessible in one central location.

Tenure Process Presentations:

February: For new tenure-track faculty

March: For newly reappointed faculty and those preparing for tenure review next year

April: For departments working on their first CPTs

Overall Update: ATC continues to maintain strong, collaborative relationships with the Dean's offices and the President.

Q&A:

- There was discussion about medium-term faculty hiring trends. The number of tenure-track cases varies significantly year to year.
- For next year, the number of cases is expected to remain steady with only a slight increase.
- A larger incoming cohort expected in 2027 is on the committee's radar, even though it will likely fall outside the current members' terms.

2. Committee on Academic Freedom & Rights (CAFR)

CAFR representative announced that Erica Bastress-Dukehart will serve as the next chair of CAFR.

Confidentiality: The committee operates under strict confidentiality protocols.

Tenure Appeals: There were no formal tenure appeals this year, as all individuals under review were granted tenure.

Informal Inquiries: The committee handled six informal inquiries involving faculty and students. Notably, none of these cases escalated to the formal stage, reflecting the committee's effective mediation efforts and commitment to resolving concerns early.

Meetings: Approximately 35 meetings were held this year, including an upcoming session with the Board of Trustees to discuss changes to the tenure review process. The discussion with the BOT centers on the Resolution already passed by a faculty floor vote - providing clarification for the meaning of "additional materials" that candidates may submit in support of their appeal following a negative tenure decision.

Academic Freedom: The committee met with the Dean and the President to discuss academic freedom and faculty rights in response to national concerns related to political interference in higher education.

Chicago Principles: The committee is preparing to discuss Skidmore's potential adoption of the Chicago Principles on freedom of expression. While the college generally operates in line with these principles, it has not formally adopted them. Copies of the principles were provided to attendees.

Additional Activities: The committee also conducted bias literacy trainings and participated in meetings with DFVPAA candidates as part of shared governance efforts.

Documentation: A summary printout of the committee's activities for the year, along with copies of the Chicago Principles, is available upon request.

Q&A:

- A question was raised regarding the utility of formally adopting the Chicago Principles versus continuing to follow them informally as guiding values.
- In response, it was noted that while Skidmore is already aligned in spirit with the Chicago Principles through current actions and protections for faculty and students, a formal adoption might serve as a stronger, symbolic commitment.

- There are individuals on campus advocating for this formal step, although it is acknowledged that individuals may have concerns that formal adoption could impose limitations or conflict with other institutional values and/or freedoms.
- It was emphasized that this topic is likely to be part of a much broader community discussion in the fall/future.

3. Faculty Development Committee (FDC)

The FDC representative announced that Monica Das will serve as the incoming Chair of the committee.

Committee Operations:

FDC follows a fairly routine calendar each year, primarily overseeing funding distribution and prestigious tenure-track faculty awards. There is typically not much structural change or novelty in its operations.

Concerns:

A notable development this year was a substantial increase in applications for summer faculty-student research grants, particularly from the sciences and community-engaged projects. While funding levels remained steady, the volume of applications exceeded available resources, leading to more rejections than in previous years. This created some concern among committee members.

Faculty Awards & Nominations:

The committee observed fewer nominations than expected for major faculty awards such as the Roth, Moseley, and Ciancio Awards.

- As a result, FDC extended deadlines to allow more time for nominations.
- Faculty are strongly encouraged to continue nominating deserving colleagues, even if they were not selected in previous years. The committee keeps a running list of past nominees and may follow up with nominators for reconsideration.
- Faculty were reminded that nominations are important, and that re-nomination is welcomed and encouraged.

Committee Turnover:

The committee will experience approximately 50% turnover next year. While this is typical due to representation from different divisions, it was noted that such high turnover can create continuity challenges.

Overall Reflections:

The committee had a productive and collegial year. While most of its work remains consistent, the increase in grant demand and concerns around award nominations were important issues raised for future consideration.

Q&A:

- A faculty member raised a concern about increased rejections in the summer research grant process and questioned whether faculty are being advised to redirect students to CBAR (which primarily supports off-campus research), particularly for international research projects.

- It was clarified that CBAR and Summer Collaborative Research Grants serve different purposes, and redirecting students from one to the other is not an appropriate solution. If additional funding is needed for certain types of research (e.g., international), the suggestion was to allocate more resources specifically for those areas rather than merging distinct funding streams.
- Spike in Humanities Proposals:
 - The committee noted an unusual increase in humanities proposals this year for summer research.
 - There was no clear explanation for the spike: it did not appear to be tied to international student participation or a specific trend. It may have simply been coincidental.
- Change in Student Compensation Structure:
 - A shift was noted in the student compensation model for summer research. Instead of receiving a flat stipend, students are now paid hourly.
 - While the total budget remained the same, hourly wages made it more expensive per student, reducing the number of students that could be supported overall.

4. Committee on Educational Policies and Planning (CEPP)

The CEPP Chair announced that Amy Frappier will serve as the incoming Chair of CEPP.

Review of Online Teaching Pilot Program and Summer Teaching:

CEPP is currently reviewing the pilot program and summer teaching policies. Comments are being accepted through Friday, after which the committee will meet once more to finalize its decision. A significant number of comments have already been received.

Transition to Online Course Evaluations:

CEPP is working on a project to move the course evaluation process online.

- A survey of peer institutions revealed that Skidmore is currently the only college out of 72 respondents still using entirely paper-based evaluations. Most others have moved online, with only a few using hybrid systems.
- Transitioning to an online platform will likely mean the elimination of department-specific evaluation forms as a college-wide strategy. Departments may still conduct additional evaluations, but managing multiple formats across systems will no longer be feasible.

Next Steps and Broader Impact:

- The project has been discussed with the NTT Negotiating Committee, PC, ATC, and the Working Group on Inclusive and Accessible Teaching and Learning, all of whom have shown broad support, especially in terms of promoting fairness and consistency across faculty ranks.
- A subcommittee of CEPP will be formed next year to determine new qualitative questions and redesign the format of the evaluations. This will involve community input and extensive deliberation.
- While the framework is being outlined now, the full implementation is unlikely before Fall 2027, given the complexity and need for thoughtful development.

Q&A:

- **Modality and Instrument Change:**

There was discussion about whether the modality (paper to online) could change without modifying the evaluation instrument itself. The initial hope was to preserve all existing questions, but this has proven difficult due to structural complications:

- **Departmental Forms Challenge:**

A major obstacle is Skidmore's current use of required, separate departmental forms for every course, which is not common practice at other institutions.

- Most colleges use a single standardized college-wide form.
- Managing dozens of departmental forms is not feasible in an online environment, particularly for staff already stretched thin.

Proposed Solution:

- The proposed solution is to eliminate required departmental forms as part of the centralized college-wide evaluation process.
- Departments may still collect their own feedback independently, especially if they have specific concerns about their curriculum or teaching methods.
- However, these departmental instruments would not be centrally managed.

- **New Qualitative Section:**

CEPP proposes to collaborate with other representatives from the faculty to develop a new set of standardized qualitative (free-response) questions for the college-wide form. These will aim to generate consistent, meaningful feedback from students.

- **Encouragement of Midterm Evaluations:**

There was support for increased use of midterm evaluations within departments as a way to generate more actionable and timely feedback for instructors.

- **Faculty Autonomy in Review Materials:**

Faculty members are reminded that they are free to submit any evaluation materials, including departmental feedback, in tenure or promotion dossiers.

5. Curriculum Committee (CC)

The CC Chair announced that Eric Morser will be the incoming Chair next year.

Busy Review Cycle:

The committee had an active year, reviewing a wide range of curricular proposals:

- 29 new regular courses
- 2 travel seminars
- 13 Scribner Seminars

- 2 new London FYE seminars
- 7 major/minor revisions
- 36 course revisions
- 119 routine revisions
- CC met 11 times in the fall semester and 12 times in the spring semester

Global Cultural Perspectives (GCP) Review

- The committee is nearing completion of its review of 23 courses for GCP alignment.
- Most courses reviewed met the Non-Western requirement once minor revisions were made to course descriptions.
- A major focus was revising language to meet non-Western/non-Eurocentric course designation criteria, primarily through minor updates to existing course descriptions.

Course Description Language Revisions:

- Following executive orders, CC reached out to chairs and program directors to invite concerned faculty to revise course descriptions with language related to DEI, broadly construed
- This effort was particularly appreciated by international faculty, many of whom responded and made edits.
- One challenge is the lack of a formal archive for these revisions, although a spreadsheet is being compiled for internal reference and future tracking.

Course Cap Adjustments for Scribner Seminars:

- CC updated its operating code to reflect recurring issues with course caps for Scribner Seminars.
- Sometimes the FYE director must raise course caps over the summer to accommodate demand, though CC is not in session during that time.
- The new language in the code acknowledges this reality and sets a minimum raised course cap threshold, allowing flexibility when needed without requiring summer approval from CC.

Q&A:

FYE Course Caps:

- A question was raised about the current process for raising or lowering course caps for Scribner Seminars.
- The revised operating code now allows the FYE Director, in consultation with the Associate Dean, to adjust course caps without going through the full CC approval process, especially during the summer when CC is not in session.
- The revision specifies that the Director should make a reasonable effort to find additional sections before increasing caps, but recognizes that efforts may be limited over the summer, and chairs may be unavailable.

Fairness Across Sections:

The goal is to avoid uneven distribution, e.g., not placing all overflow students in one professor's course. Instead, additional students are to be distributed evenly across sections as much as possible.

Instructor Autonomy:

Instructors still retain the option to decline enrollment increases. Historically, requests to raise caps relied on the “soft power” of the FYE Director, which created pressure without formal authority.

Additional CC Work:

CC has also contributed to Middle States reaccreditation by supplying relevant curricular information.

The committee’s relationship with the administration was briefly noted to be cooperative and generally positive.

6. Committee on Academic Standing (CAS)

Chair Transition:

The current CAS Chair indicated that the incoming chair has not yet been confirmed. While another committee member is senior in service, they will not be continuing. Unless another faculty member is identified soon, the current Chair is likely to continue serving in that role for another year.

Committee Composition & Responsibilities:

- CAS consists of three faculty members, though the other two are not in a position to assume the chairship.
- The committee met weekly and focused largely on reviewing student petitions related to late withdrawals, grading issues, and exceptions to academic policy.

Grade Inflation Discussion:

- A major topic this year has been grade inflation. The committee has observed that current academic policies and safety nets (e.g., withdrawal options, petition approvals) may reduce the impact of poor grades on students' GPAs.
- This shift, while supportive, may partially contribute to inflation trends. The committee continues to explore the causes and effects of grade inflation and discuss potential responses.

Workload Timing Challenges:

A recurring issue for CAS is the timing of its responsibilities:

- The committee must review seniors at risk of not graduating in May.
- It must also evaluate underclass students in academic jeopardy in June, after faculty contracts typically end.
- This raises questions about who serves on CAS over the summer and how to ensure proper representation and continuity.

Administrative Collaboration:

The committee noted a positive working relationship with the administration, describing it as better than cordial and highly cooperative.

Chair Succession Planning:

There was discussion about Denise Evert (who will join the committee in Fall 2025) potentially serving as Chair in a future year, though not immediately. The current Chair is willing to serve one more year if needed, and then transition the role to Denise, pending her agreement and the committee's support.

Committee Continuity and Governance:

It was acknowledged that chairing CAS has been a challenge in recent years, with difficulties finding willing volunteers. Continued discussion and planning are needed to ensure smoother transitions and adequate faculty participation. Despite these challenges, the Chair agreed that the committee's work- particularly in supporting students through difficult academic circumstances- is both important and worthwhile.

Q&A:

- **June Workload and Faculty Contracts:**
 - A major issue raised was the requirement for CAS to conduct student reviews in June, which falls outside the period covered by most faculty contracts.
 - This timing is necessary because grades are not finalized until late May or early June, after which CAS must quickly determine academic standing and send letters to students (and sometimes parents) about probation or disqualification status.
 - There was consensus that the timing is unavoidable, but it creates logistical challenges and fairness concerns, especially for faculty who are not on campus or are on 10-month contracts.

- **Need for Substitutes:**

Because not all CAS members are available in June, the committee often needs to find substitutes who can be physically present. This has proven difficult year after year.

- **Suggestion to Address Compensation:**

A suggestion was made to explore whether June service could be formally recognized or compensated, particularly for those whose contracts do not cover the summer period.

- **Zoom Participation and Privacy:**

The use of Zoom for June meetings was discussed. While Zoom was used during the pandemic, it is currently discouraged- Associate Dean has expressed strong opposition, likely due to student privacy and confidentiality concerns when discussing sensitive academic records.

7. Committee on Intercultural and Global Understanding (CIGU)

The CIGU Co-Chair announced that Aiwu Zhao will serve as the incoming Co-Chair of CIGU.

Strategic Planning - DEI Component:

During Fall 2024, CIGU concentrated on drafting the Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) section of Skidmore's upcoming Strategic Plan. In Spring 2025, the committee revised its recommendations in response to feedback from President Conner's draft of the plan.

Equity in Mental Health Initiative:

CIGU met with Counseling Center Director Robert Cardom for an update on the Steve Fund's Equity in Mental Health on Campus initiative, which aims to improve mental health outcomes for students of color.

Student Concerns - Cultural Food Access:

The committee discussed student concerns about barriers to using outside caterers or purchasing food off-campus for on-campus events, particularly when it involves ethnic and cultural foods.

These concerns were elevated to Associate VP Kelley Patton-Ostrander and VP Daniel Konstalid by VP and CIGU Co-Chair Joshua Woodfork and General Counsel/VP for HR Sarah Vero.

Upcoming Discussion - NAGPRA:

At its final meeting of the academic year on May 9, CIGU will meet with the Dean's Office to discuss Skidmore's obligations under the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act (NAGPRA).

8. Athletic Council (AC)

Daniel Peterson will continue to serve as Chair.

The primary agenda item addressed by the committee this year was the recurring issue of fall semester athletes needing early housing accommodations. Many fall athletes are required to return to campus weeks before the semester begins for pre-season training, but Skidmore only guarantees housing during this early period for students who choose to live on campus. Those living off-campus are responsible for arranging their own short-term accommodations, often an expensive and logistically difficult task, especially in Saratoga Springs during August.

Although this issue has surfaced multiple times in past years, a sustainable solution has remained elusive. The Athletic Director expressed sympathy for students facing this challenge but reaffirmed the current position: if guaranteed housing is a priority, athletes should strongly consider choosing on-campus housing. This stance is rooted in practicality, though many students still prefer to live off-campus for various personal reasons.

The final resolution was somewhat anticlimactic. An informational email was sent to fall athletes advising them to begin planning early and reconsider on-campus housing if early move-in is a concern. While not a comprehensive fix, the communication at least acknowledged the issue and encouraged proactive planning.

Beyond this primary topic, the committee conducted routine meetings with representatives from Academic Services, Admissions, and Advancement to maintain annual updates and communication. Additionally, the committee recognized the Scholar-Athlete of the Year, which for 2024-25 was awarded to Maggie Dineen, an All-American hockey player.

9. Periclean Honors Forum Council (PHF)

The same Chair will continue serving in the role for the upcoming academic year.

Operations and Meetings:

- The Council met biweekly throughout the academic year, conducting regular business including reviewing Honors Forum applicants.
- Almost 90 applications were received, and approximately 75 invitations were extended to a group comprised of both first- and second-year students. Of these 75 invitations, 49 first-year students enrolled in and were inducted into the forum.
- The current Honors Forum enrollment is 209 students, with 30 seniors preparing to graduate.

Programming and Events:

- Activities included a New York City field trip in the fall to attend a Broadway show.
- A faculty-student dialogue featured Lisa Jackson-Schebetta (Theater), who shared her professional and personal journey.
- The Ramsey Lecture by Tillman Nechtman (History) focused on Captain Cook and the provenance of a Hai-Tiki necklace. It was well attended by incoming Honors Forum students.
- The Council co-hosted a “Dialogue Across Difference” event with *New York Times* conservative columnist Ross Douthat, who was joined by Jennifer Delton, Kate Graney, and Pushi Prasad for a lively debate on global politics.

Academic Talks:

- Adrian Daub from Stanford gave a virtual lecture titled "What Tech Calls Governing," based on his recent book, *What Tech Calls Thinking*.
- He was unable to attend in person due to his husband’s employment status as a federal civil servant being imperiled by ongoing “DOGE” cuts to government agencies, adding personal relevance to his remarks.

Community Engagement:

- The Council met with Eric Morser to discuss volunteerships and civic engagement.
- There was collaboration with Career Development to enhance opportunities for student professionalization and employment readiness.
- A white paper on the value of the Honors Forum was co-authored with past directors and sent to the President during the process of Strategic Planning earlier in the term.

Recognition and Review:

- The Council adjudicated and selected recipients for the Periclean Scholar Awards, to be conferred at the Honors Forum graduation ceremony.
- Numerous honors project proposals, capstone applications, and thesis drafts were reviewed over the year.

Program Review and Administration:

- A self-study of the Honors Forum, the first since 2010, is underway.
- Concerns were raised about administrative suggestions that the Honors Forum might be “sunset,” which caused tension and prompted deeper reflection on the program’s institutional value.

Closing Note:

Despite institutional challenges, the Council remained committed to enhancing academic excellence, student engagement, and civic learning opportunities through the Honors Forum.

10. Promotions Committee (PC)

The PC member announced that Kendrah Murphy will serve as the incoming PC Chair.

2024-2025 Activities and Accomplishments:

- Conducted standard business of reviewing promotion cases.
- Drafted new Faculty Handbook language for promotion to full professor, which will go into effect for the upcoming promotion cycle.
- Developed rubrics and procedures for reviewing promotion files and conducting committee meetings. These resources aim to increase transparency and will be posted to the Dean’s Office website in May.

Worked with the Dean’s Office on writing guidelines for:

- Department Chair letters for promotion to full professor.
- Teaching statements submitted with promotion cases.
- These documents are now available online and faculty are encouraged to review them when preparing cases.

Goals for 2025-2026:

- Faculty Rank on PC:
 - Currently, there is no formal requirement that full professors serve on PC, unlike at peer institutions.
 - PC proposes discussing a change to ensure a minimum of two full professors serve on the committee at all times.
 - While full professors have often served in recent years, this has been coincidental, not guaranteed.
 - Concerns were raised about the appropriateness of associate professors overseeing promotion-to-full cases without full professors involved.
- External Review Letters:

- The committee will explore the creation of a college-wide procedure for soliciting external letters for both tenure and promotion cases.
- PC supports a model where:
 - Candidates submit a list of suggested external reviewers.
 - Department chairs select and contact reviewers from that list.
- This change is intended to reduce inconsistencies in practices across departments.

Next Steps:

- PC will collaborate with the Dean's Office, ATC, and other governance bodies on these proposed changes.
- Faculty are encouraged to share thoughts on:
 - Requiring full professor representation on PC.
 - Standardizing procedures for external letter solicitation.

11. Faculty Executive Committee (FEC)

FEC's incoming chair will be Ting Li.

Committee Work & Motions:

- Concluded the bulk of elections and appointments for the academic year.
- Resolved outstanding issues from the previous semester, some of which resulted in motions.
- Collaborated with several committees (FAB, PC, CAFR, ATC) to fix handbook inconsistencies and revise operating codes.
- Supported motions that were successfully passed this semester.

Governance System Review (Phase 1):

- Continued the multi-year effort to evaluate and improve faculty governance.
- Completed audits of committees (initiated last year), updated websites, and refined reporting structures.
- Worked closely with ATC and others to revise election cycles and ensure clarity in committee membership and service timelines.

The "Accounting Problem":

- Drafted and circulated a tentative proposal aimed at improving faculty availability for committee service (ensuring fairness and service alignment).
- Received positive faculty feedback and plan to bring it to a vote in the fall.
- Acknowledged FEC member Jeremy Day-O'Connell for proposing the simplified and effective solution that replaced a more complex lottery-based idea.

Other Contributions:

- Ting Li contributed to the Middle States accreditation work and served on the Academic Affairs Leadership Group.
- Participated in the faculty-only meeting regarding Huron Consulting updates, with colleagues including Tim Harper, Nick Junkerman, and Maggie Greaves.

Logistics & Looking Ahead:

- Weekly meetings held throughout the semester to manage ongoing tasks.
- Current Chair will step down on May 31 and asked committee members to submit annual reports before that date.
- Notes from this Committee of Committees meeting will be finalized and shared with the faculty.

Closing Remarks

Appreciation was expressed for committee efforts and contributions throughout the year.

Light-hearted moment encouraging colleagues to enjoy cookies and reflect on the progress made.

Suggestions made to continue fun quorum counts during faculty meeting and entertaining updates in future communications from FEC.