

COMMITTEE ON ACADEMIC STANDING OPERATING GUIDELINES

Revised Spring 2017

D. Eligibility Standards for Off-Campus Study (Revised February 2017)

1) Background

The Committee on Academic Standing (CAS) is called upon to review and determine the eligibility of students wanting to study off campus to ensure they meet defined standards and expectations. Because the CAS values information about student applications only known by those in the Office of Off-Campus Study & Exchanges (OCSE), each semester the Chair of the CAS will ask the Director of OCSE to provide a representative from that office to attend the CAS meetings. The OCSE representative will present petitions to the CAS for students who do not meet the established eligibility requirements. The OCSE representative does not vote on the outcome of the petition, rather, OCSE submits the petition for review and informs the discussion as needed.

2) Eligibility Standards and Rationale

The CAS observes certain threshold criteria in determining whether an applicant is sufficiently prepared to succeed in their off-campus study experience, this includes a minimum GPA requirement. In fall of 2016, the Director of OCSE proposed that the GPA requirement for off-campus study be reduced. The proposal called for a new eligibility requirement of a minimum cumulative GPA of 2.750; students with cumulative GPAs between 2.749 and 2.500 would be allowed to petition the CAS for an exception to the policy. The CAS approved this new requirement as a three-year pilot program (November 30, 2016); CEPP endorsed the new requirement as well (December 14, 2016).

The original requirement of a minimum 3.000 cumulative GPA was put into place in 1991 based on rationales that are no longer valid given the shift in Skidmore's goals around international education and intercultural learning. Since that time, Skidmore has moved from viewing study abroad as a privilege to valuing off-campus study as an integral part of students' education at Skidmore. The former GPA requirement can now be seen as a barrier to access to this vital educational opportunity and was reviewed and revised with this in mind.

Specifically, the following shifts in rationales were considered carefully when determining the eligibility threshold for off-campus study:

1. Our 3.000 GPA requirement no longer aligns with accepted eligibility requirements in the field of international education or at our peer and aspirant schools. The large majority of our peer and aspirant schools require 2.750 or lower. In addition, strong programs that Skidmore has supported for years have reconsidered the need for a 3.000 and have moved to 2.750 or 2.500 as their eligibility threshold. They have done so in response to national conversations regarding GPA as a barrier to access for students from underrepresented groups. Therefore, a lower GPA no longer prohibits students from finding available programs.

2. It remains true that a large majority of Skidmore students have a cumulative GPA of 3.000 or above (~82%). However, Skidmore has embraced the philosophy that international and intercultural education are vital to our students' education. The fact that the majority of students have a 3.000 or above does not justify limiting access to this opportunity to those with below a 3.000. Over the past five years, the CAS has embraced this perspective when reviewing student petitions: 97% of GPA petitions between 2.990 and 2.750 were approved in that time. The new GPA threshold allows greater student access and standardizes the CAS's current practice.
3. Data shows that a student's cumulative GPA prior to studying off campus is not indicative of their ability to succeed while abroad. Students who have petitioned to study abroad due to lower GPAs are just as successful – in some cases more successful – than their peers who did not have to petition. Therefore, the argument that students with GPAs below 3.000 are at higher risk is no longer valid.
4. Given that Skidmore has spent many years building solid partnerships with our program providers, a student's academic achievement prior to studying abroad will not affect our relationship with a program provider or students' future access to a specific program. In fact, OCSE spends much more time working with programs on students' behavioral issues than on academic concerns. The rationale that students with lower GPAs disadvantage Skidmore or other Skidmore students no longer applies.

a) Specific Requirements for All Students: Skidmore requires applicants for off-campus study to present the following evidence of their academic and personal preparedness for success on the host program:

- A minimum 2.750 cumulative GPA.
- Appropriate academic background and performance levels for the program to which the student is applying.
- Completion of appropriate all-college requirements based on the student's year of study and major or an acceptable plan for completing such requirements. The student must have declared a major *prior* to applying to OCSE.
- A clear academic and social integrity record as determined by the Associate Dean of the Faculty and the Assistant Director of Student Conduct who oversee integrity issues.
- Students who are on academic probation are not eligible for off-campus study.

b) Petition Review: The CAS will consider petitions from students whose cumulative GPA falls between 2.749 and 2.500. Students with below a 2.500 cumulative GPA may petition the CAS for an exception to the GPA requirement. However, the CAS has never granted an exception to any student below a 2.500.

Student petitions should include the following:

- An academic record that EITHER demonstrates a preponderance of work in the B- range from one semester to the next across various disciplines OR demonstrates an upward trajectory from one semester to the next. The CAS understands that one poor semester early in the first year on campus can have a tremendous impact on a student's cumulative GPA. Special attention will be paid to the cumulative GPA in the major.

- A petition statement from the student that explains the reasons for the lower GPA and their plans for ensuring a successful term off campus. The statement should also outline the student's academic background and interests as they relate to and support the proposed off-campus program; describe the student's academic and cultural learning goals as they relate to the proposed off-campus program; and articulate the student's academic and personal strengths in relation to the challenges of studying off campus.
- Two letters of support from Skidmore faculty that speak to the student's academic abilities and classroom behavior patterns (e.g., intellectual commitment, diligence, reliability) and offer evidence of the student's ability to succeed while off campus. The CAS may also request further testimony directly from faculty.
- Other factors that the CAS could consider include the student's previous experience with the host culture of the program abroad (or successful experience with other cultures), fluency in the language needed for success in the program abroad, and the academic focus of the program and how it relates to the student's area of academic strength.
- Note: A student's record of co-curricular and related accomplishments may suggest personal and intellectual qualities that help prepare the student for off-campus study. Such evidence may be considered as a complement to the academic record but not as a substitute for solid academic achievement or as an explanation for why the academic record is not stronger.

c) Petition Process:

- OCSE has a designated representative who presents student petitions to the CAS; this OCSE representative does not vote on the CAS decision.
- The CAS meets once a week during the academic year. The OCSE representative to the CAS presents student GPA petitions to the CAS during these weekly meetings. Petitions are reviewed by the CAS during those weekly meetings only.
- Students, faculty, and parents cannot appear in person to present their petition to the committee at any time.
- Students must meet deadlines established by OCSE to allow for processing of the application prior to the CAS meeting. If a weekly deadline is not met, the student's petition will be presented the following week.
- OCSE will inform students of the CAS's decision within three business days of the CAS decision.
- Students petitioning to study off campus should refer to "Committee on Academic Standing (CAS) Policies & Procedures for Off-Campus Study GPA Petitions." Appendix One.

3) Maintaining Standards after the CAS Approval

All students approved for off-campus study, whether through petition or not, must maintain good academic and social standing at the College prior to the semester they are studying away. At the end of each semester, the Registrar generates a summary list of term and cumulative GPAs for ALL students studying off campus. All students who have a term GPA of 2.500 or below OR demonstrate a significant drop in their academic record will be reviewed by the Associate Dean of the Faculty, the Chair of the CAS, and the Director of Off-Campus Study & Exchanges.

Note: The end-of-term GPA review could result in an administrative withdrawal from a previously approved program. Typically, students with a term GPA of below 2.000 will be automatically withdrawn from off-campus study.

If a student is withdrawn from off-campus study due to academic concerns, the student will remain responsible for all financial obligations as determined by Skidmore and the sponsoring program. This student will be permitted to register for classes at Skidmore or to apply for a leave of absence from Skidmore.

4) Students Studying Off Campus Outside of the Junior Year

Students who will not be juniors at the time they study off campus will be required to submit a one page statement and a letter of faculty support (for first-year students, preferably from the instructor of the student's Scribner Seminar). The statement should indicate why the student wants to study off-campus outside the junior year and what their academic plans are for the remainder of their time at Skidmore. The purpose of the letter is to indicate that the student can graduate as planned and has advisor/departmental support.

OCSE will request and review a degree audit from the Registrar's Office. OCSE will review the materials and meet with students whose materials raise questions regarding their academic plans or reasons for needing to study off campus in the proposed semester.

Note: All students with below a 2.750 GPA, regardless of class year, must still petition to the Committee on Academic Standing for an exception to the GPA requirement.

5) Countries with Department of State Warnings

Skidmore does not endorse or approve study abroad to countries where there is an active Department of State Warning. There is no petition process for students seeking to study in a country where there is an active Department of State Warning. Students must take a personal leave in order to study abroad in a country where there is an active Department of State Warning and they do so with the understanding that there is no pre-approval process for the potential transfer of credits earned on such a program. Such credit transfers are evaluated on a case by case basis by the Registrar's Office and the CAS upon the student's return to Skidmore College. In any case, students may not transfer more than 18 credits back to Skidmore from study abroad undertaken in a country with an active Department of State Warning while on leave. In the event that the Registrar's Office and the CAS agree to accept credits from such a program, this action shall not be interpreted to hold Skidmore College liable in any way for activities undertaken while the student was on personal leave.

6) Limit to Number of Semesters Abroad with Same Program Provider.

Students may not participate in programs offered by the same non-Skidmore program provider for more than two semesters. For example, a student is not allowed to participate in three, semester-long IFSA-Butler programs during their time at Skidmore. Students who participate in Skidmore programs are not limited to the number of semesters they may participate in any Skidmore program. Note: Skidmore's First-Year Experience in London is a Skidmore program and does not count toward the number of IES programs a student may pursue.

7) Students who Choose to Study Off-Campus without OCSE Approval.

Except in cases described in Section 5 above, Skidmore will not accept any credit for semester- or year-long off-campus programs that have not gone through the appropriate approval processes.

APPENDIX ONE

Committee on Academic Standing (CAS) Policies & Procedures for Off-Campus Study GPA Petitions (revised February 2017)

The Committee on Academic Standing (CAS) is comprised of three faculty members, the Associate Dean of the Faculty, representatives from the Office of Academic Advising and the Registrar's office, and two students nominated by SGA. In addition, a representative of the Office of Off-Campus Study & Exchanges (OCSE) attends the CAS meetings. CAS is called upon to review and determine the eligibility of students wanting to study off campus to ensure they meet defined standards and expectations. The OCSE representative will present petitions to CAS for students who do not meet the established eligibility requirements. The OCSE representative does not vote on the outcome of the petition, rather, OCSE submits the petition for review and informs the discussion as needed. This document serves as a reference tool for all students wishing to petition CAS.

Eligibility:

To be eligible to study off campus, Skidmore requires that a student have a minimum cumulative GPA of 2.750. Students who have cumulative GPAs between 2.749 and 2.500 are allowed to petition CAS for an exception to this policy. Students with cumulative GPAs of below 2.500 are allowed to petition for an exception; however, CAS has never granted an exception to any student below a 2.500.

Petition Process:

- All students wishing to present a petition to CAS must meet with an OCSE advisor to discuss the petition process and their individual petitions. Students are responsible for arranging this meeting.
- Students must meet deadlines established by OCSE to allow for processing of the application prior to the CAS meeting. If a weekly deadline is not met, the student's petition will be presented the following week.
- CAS meets once a week during the academic year. OCSE presents student GPA petitions to CAS during these weekly meetings. Petitions are reviewed by CAS during those weekly meetings only.
- Students, faculty, and parents cannot appear in person to present their petition to the committee at any time.
- OCSE will inform students of CAS's decision within three business days of the CAS decision.

Petition Materials Should Include:

- A one (1) page personal statement written by the student that explains the reasons for the lower GPA and their plans for ensuring a successful term off campus. The statement should also outline the student's academic background and interests as they relate to and support the proposed off-campus program; describe the student's academic and cultural learning goals as they relate to the proposed off-campus program; and articulate the student's academic and personal strengths in relation to the challenges of studying off campus.

- Two letters of support from Skidmore faculty that speak to the student's academic abilities and classroom behavior patterns (e.g., intellectual commitment, diligence, reliability) and offer evidence of the student's ability to succeed while off campus. CAS may also request further testimony directly from faculty.
- An academic record that EITHER demonstrates a preponderance of work in the B- range from one semester to the next across various disciplines OR demonstrates an upward trajectory from one semester to the next. CAS understands that one poor semester early in the first year on campus can have a tremendous impact on a student's cumulative GPA. Special attention will be paid to the cumulative GPA in the major.

Petition Review:

The committee considers all petitions on an individual basis, and, therefore, may approve a 2.500 and/or deny a 2.700 based on the quality of the student's personal statement and faculty recommendations, as well as a demonstrated improvement in academic record. The CAS also looks for demonstrated maturity and self-discipline indicating that the student is likely to succeed in the face of the additional challenges off-campus study presents.

Other factors that CAS could consider include the student's previous experience with the host culture of the program abroad (or successful experience with other cultures), fluency in the language needed for success in the program abroad, and the academic focus of the program and how it relates to the student's area of academic strength. A student's record of co-curricular and related accomplishments may suggest personal and intellectual qualities that help prepare the student for off-campus study. Such evidence may be considered as a complement to the academic record but not as a substitute for solid academic achievement or as an explanation for why the academic record is not stronger.

Based upon the consideration of the individual petition there are a few possible outcomes:

1. The student could be approved.
2. The student could be denied.
3. The student could be asked to provide additional information for consideration before a decision is made.

Reviewed and Approved by the Committee on Academic Standing
February 2017