

Student Services Committee 2019-2020 Summary Report
Dr. Julie Wade

Explanation of Purpose: Per the 2019 Faculty Manual, this Committee “is responsible for recommendations to the Faculty Senate regarding admission and continuation policies within University guidelines and the Academic Honor Code and Campus Discipline Code. Any policy of any academic support unit that affects its patrons may be reviewed at the discretion of the Committee. The Committee reviews and determines appeals for students who are not making satisfactory academic progress, in accord with federal statute.”

In terms of day to day activities, the primary work done by this committee is to evaluate and vote on student appeals as relayed to the committee via Donette Stewart or Mary-David Fox.

Committee Activities for 2019-2020: The committee met in person on 9/23/19 for introductions, discussion of the committee purpose defined in the faculty manual, and discussion of potential committee goals. In general, the primary work performed by the committee is operational on a continuing basis, rather than more project or goal based. On a weekly basis, the committee coordinates via email to process students quickly so we can send decisions regarding student appeals to Donette Stewart or Mary-David Fox.

The committee will be meeting again virtually at the end of April to move suspension appeals through. During my term as committee chair (7/1 – 4/13), the committee processed 168 admissions cases, 49 suspension appeals, and 28 appeals for admission. Based on my experience this year, I plan to hold meetings prior to the beginning of each semester to work on suspension appeals and get everyone on the same page.

Proposed Improvements to the Committee: Based on a mandate to seek self-improvement, as committee chair, I met with individuals who were key stakeholders in the process, including Bridget Kirkland (the former chair), Lizabeth Zack, Donette Stewart, Kim Purdy, and Mary-David Fox. Based on my meetings, I developed potential improvements to streamline the process more, including:

- Additional face to face meetings, though additional meetings are difficult because the committee needs to move quickly to process appeals and regular face to face meetings are difficult to schedule
- Using Google docs, SharePoint or some way to openly share information and votes quicker, though this change is challenging because there are privacy and notification concerns. Also, apparently the committee tried it before—unsuccessfully
- Creating standards for making decisions. This met with a lot of resistance here from committee members and stakeholders of the process who indicated they did not want to unnecessarily “prime” committee members with certain standards. It was also suggested that historically the standards do not transition well between chairs, and that standards might be too high. Accordingly, this proposal encountered some resistance to change.

I used the remainder of the year to outline the process/calendar of work flow with notes in italics regarding areas that I feel could use additional improvement.

Process for Admission Appeals (continuous)

1) Donette sends appeal information and student records to the committee chair

- a) *The records are screenshots so text cannot be copied and pasted into the spreadsheets the committee works with*
 - b) *The screenshots are sometimes poor quality and can be difficult to read*
 - c) *The records come in a piecemeal manner and can be sent at any time. The records are often sent as they are received, not in a batch, so there is a chance some may be lost or misfiled by the committee chair.*
- 2) The committee chair enters information on the student appeals into an Excel spreadsheet that is sent to the committee**
- a) *The chair has to manually enter the info (from a screenshot) into the spreadsheet so there is risk of human error. This is why it is troublesome that the information comes in a screenshot in that numbers cannot be copied/pasted and why low quality screenshots occasionally make it difficult to read key numbers like standardized test scores, GPA or class rank.*
- 3) The committee receives the spreadsheet with a deadline, usually a week, to return votes on student appeals to the chair. Committee members vote on around 4-30 cases (with an average of around 10 cases) each week.**
- a) *Members less familiar with Excel may struggle with manipulating the spreadsheet to find information and return votes*
- 4) Committee members send their decisions to the chair**
- a) *Member standards seem to be highly variable*
 - b) *Some members do not vote or participate at all which is especially bad in event of a tie. Note that there are 7 members so there should not be ties if everyone participates.*
 - c) *Given that some members have voted yes on nearly every appeal, it is unclear the extent to which some evaluate the files or are invested in the validity of the process*
- 5) The chair consolidates the member votes into one summarized document, which is then sent to Donette and Kim**
- a) *The committee members indicated in the 9/23 meeting that they preferred not to receive “confirmatory” emails from the chair to avoid email overload, but there is not a “follow up” in the sense that the committee sees the outcomes of their work*

Process for Suspension Appeals

- 1) Mary-David sends the appeal information and records via PDFS to the committee chair**
- a) *These are usually sent near the beginning of a semester*
 - b) *The deadline for these provides for a very short window*
 - c) *The appeals are sent sporadically. They are often sent to the chair one at a time throughout the day. There is a bottleneck here, because if I just forward them to the committee as they come in, it overloads the committee and creates an unorganized back-and-forth between me and each individual committee member as they try to juggle each suspension within a tight time period.*
- 2) The chair combines the many suspension appeals into a single email each day to forward to the entire committee**
- a) *These many appeals are combined into one email so the committee is not being bombarded with emails each day*
- 3) The committee members review each suspension appeal and return votes on the appeals**
- a) *Given that many of these occur over winter break and before the spring semester starts, not even half of the committee was participating this semester as many of them are on break and were not checking or responding to emails.*
 - b) *As noted above, some members are not invested in the process and vote yes on every appeal regardless of context*

- c) *Accordingly, it is very difficult to get a consensus from the committee and return it for administrative action before the semester starts*
- 4) The committee chair combines the committee votes into a single document and sends the votes to Mary David**
- a) *Due to the vast number of suspension appeals incoming, especially before the Spring semester starts, it is really difficult to get participation from the committee, keep all the files organized and their associated votes, and send them all to Mary David without missing any*
- b) *Further, these between semester votes are not necessarily representative of the committee given the non-votes and those that only vote yes*
- c) *Given the email-based nature of this process, in the understandable interest of speed, it seems very easy to become overloaded during high-demand time periods. This process would vastly benefit if it could be put into SharePoint or another system where records and votes would not have to be shared back and forth constantly via email.*
- 5) Due to the short time window for receiving and returning appeals, students likely find out their decision after the semester has started, though before add/drop is over**

Key Potential Process Improvements:

- Sharing files electronically using a system like SharePoint or Google Docs to exchange information and votes instead of relying on a mass of emails
- Setting a deadline for the committee to receive suspension appeals all at once rather than a constant trickle
- Alternatively, my goal is to set regular meetings prior to the start of each semester to go over suspension appeals, though the committee will need time in advance to receive and review the appeals
- The committee could work with student records more easily if records were already entered into a spreadsheet so the faculty member committee chair spends less time doing work entering data from a screenshot into a spreadsheet
- Onboarding new members more seamlessly is another area I'm seeking to improve. Regular meetings will help, but I also think providing more documents, in one place, that cover university admissions standards, the academic probation process, etc., will be useful

Moving Forward into 2020-2021: The committee was missing 3 members (per the description in the manual) and will be rotating members off. Accordingly, I was unable to recruit a new chair. My thought is to stay on as chair and bring in a chair elect in the fall semester and spend spring transitioning to the chair elect.