

Student Services Committee 2020-2021 Summary Report
Dr. Julie Wade

Explanation of Purpose: Per the 2020 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 2020-2021: The committee met virtually on 10/30/2020 for introductions, discussion of the committee purpose defined in the faculty manual, and discussion of potential committee goals. Donette also attended and gave general remarks about the process and what the committee could expect, given the pandemic. 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 met again virtually on 11/30/2020 to discuss our process for moving suspension appeals through. We tend to receive the largest amount of files over winter break and the suspension appeals have to move quickly so impacted students can register for their spring courses. Historically, this has been a bottleneck for the committee but this year, the committee met with a key part of the process, Mary-David Fox, to work out a solution for ensuring students receive decisions as early as possible. In particular, the committee agreed to send their votes in by January 8th and to schedule a tentative meeting to vote on any files that were unfinished. Fortunately, all appeals were decided by January 7th, 2021, resulting in canceling the scheduled January meeting.

The committee held its end of the year meeting on 4/22/2021 to discuss any outstanding files/items and elect a new chair. Matthew Brisebois (SOEPH) will serve as next year’s chair and Shuang Hundley (CAHSS-FACS) will serve as chair-elect.

During my second term as committee chair (4/14 – 5/31), the committee processed 74 admissions cases, 10 suspension appeals, and 6 appeals for admission. Based on my experience this year, meeting virtually a few times a year expedited the process and was especially meaningful for processing suspension appeals. Note that, due to the pandemic, the committee decided on considerably less student files. In 2019-2020, we processed 168 admissions cases, 49 suspension appeals, and 28 appeals for admission. As we return to normal operations, more meetings may be necessary.

Proposed Improvements to the Committee: The committee made a number of improvements this year to really streamline our processes. Improvements included:

- The committee met virtually more frequently and included valuable members of the process, such as Donette Stewart and Mary-David Fox. I’ll note that adding additional meetings is not always appropriate because the committee needs to move quickly to process appeals and regular face to face or virtual meetings are difficult to schedule.
- This year, student files were also made available on Microsoft Teams. Though our process for voting did not change, all committee members had access to complete files and this reduced margin of human error that could happen from the committee chair manually inputting information in.
- Regarding suspension appeals, the committee met with Mary-David Fox to iron out a way to respond quickly to suspension appeals requiring votes over winter break. The importance of responding

expediently, even while on break, was impressed upon the committee members and together, the committee and Mary-David agreed on clear deadlines for when the committee would receive files and turn in votes. This improvement organized and streamlined the process, saving considerable time and confusion; it was especially important for students who were waiting for a committee decision in order to register for spring courses. However, given the lower volume of appeals we received this year, I have concerns that more improvements are likely needed.

Moving into next year, there are still areas that require improvement. I recommend:

• Though making the files available via Teams has been helpful for committee members, the core process of sending files, and receiving committee votes, has not changed. That is, the current process of voting on admissions decisions and appeals for admissions is as follows (areas of improvement are indicated in *italics*):

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.*
 - d) The records are also available on Microsoft Teams.
- 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.*
 - b) This year, student files are available on Microsoft Teams but *varying members of the committee actually view the files this way.*
- 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. The volume of files was lower this year.
 - 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 Stewart.

Ideally, the entire voting process should be streamlined and moved onto Teams, Google Docs, or Sharepoint. That the files are now available on Teams for everyone to view is a great step forward, but it can be difficult to know when and where the files become available for members to view and vote on. As a result, varying members of the committee use Teams to look at the files, despite their availability.

• Creating standards for making decisions. Historically, this has met with a lot of resistance 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. Given the majority of committee members were new this year (75% of members were new), we tabled this improvement.

- The committee members indicated in the 10/30 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.

- I am concerned that the committee’s rapid response to suspension appeals and perceived improvement was due to having a lower number of appeals to get through (due to the pandemic). I am not sure that the committee will otherwise be able to respond nearly as quickly with the normal amount of appeals and with such a tight deadline, especially when faculty are on a break. Part of the hold-up is that the students must meet with their advisor in order to turn in their paperwork. The advisor’s assessment of the student often has an influence on committee decisions but it does bottleneck the process.

Key Potential Process Improvements:

- Sharing votes electronically using a system like SharePoint or Google Docs instead of relying on a mass of emails.

- Adjusting the suspension appeals process. Perhaps the committee should be responsible only for students who are appealing for the 2nd or 3rd time, so as to reduce the amount of files committee members receive while on holiday. Alternatively, this may be improved by setting a more reasonable deadline for the committee to process suspension appeals (or to perhaps build into the process that these students must meet with their advisors sooner) or by the committee continuing to meet prior to the start of the semester to knock them out (though larger volumes of files will need to be sent with more lead time for faculty to read and make decisions. This year, we received our final batch of files a few days before our deadline that we set as a committee; this likely will not work if the volume of appeals increases).

- 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 that can use improvement. Regular meetings helped with our large amount of new committee members who joined this year, 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.

Moving Forward into 2021-2022: During our April meeting, the committee elected a new chair (Matthew Brisebois), as well as a chair-elect (Shuang Hundley), for next year. I have one year remaining as well, so I will be able to advise the new chair as necessary.