

Students Services Committee Spring 2022 Report

Dr. Matthew Brisebois

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 Summer 2021-Spring of 2022: I was elected as Committee Chair for the 2021-2022 school year in May of 2021 and relieved Dr. Julie Wade. Dr. Shuang Hundley was selected to be chair-elect for the 2022-2023 school year. Dr. Julie Wade continues to serve on the committee and provides guidance when necessary. Throughout Summer 2021-Spring 2022, I received emails from Donnette Stewart and Mary-David Fox on admission cases, admission appeals, and academic suspension appeals that needed to be voted on by the Committee. I would disseminate the appeals to the committee members and advise them on a deadline for votes. Review of appeals and voting occurred on the committee members’ own time. As the deadline for a vote approached, I would reach out to committee members with reminders. Over the course of the year, the committee successfully voted on 84 suspension appeals, 17 admission appeals, and 4 transfer appeals. Dr. Tracey Miller (SON) and Dr. Melissa Pilgrim (CST-MCS) were new additions to the committee, and I met with each individually to explain our responsibilities and our process for voting on appeals. The committee met on 9/13/21 for introductions, to discuss the voting process, and discuss potential improvements. The committee also met on 1/26/22 to discuss a proposal from Mary-David Fox that only students with 12 credit hours at USC Upstate could be placed on Academic Probation. Finally, the committee met on 4/11/22 to transition Chair duties to Dr. Shuang Hundley.

An ongoing challenge has also been deciding how to vote on admission cases. The unique situation of each student is unknown, so the members of the committee unanimously agreed that students should submit a letter explaining their circumstances and goals related to attending USC Upstate. I met with Mary-David Fox to discuss this possibility, and it was decided that students appealing for admission be required to write a personal statement, and it will be recommended that they obtain letters of recommendation. After implementing this new policy, members of the committee agreed that it was much easier to make decisions on students’ admission cases.

Another ongoing challenge has been whether to believe students’ claims in their appeal letters. Some committee members proposed requiring evidence to back up claims (health issues, psychological issues, etc.). Some committee members expressed hesitance, as some issues cannot be documented. We may add a statement to the document which states, “Including documentation as evidence to support your explanation is recommended”. I met with Mary-David Fox to discuss this possibility, and this language was added to the appeal letter.

Mary-David Fox proposed a minor change to the academic suspension appeal process: Students may only be placed on academic suspension if they have at least 12 credit hours at USC Upstate. This would ensure that students enrolled in one or two courses, such as for dual enrollment, could not be placed on probation, which is not a fair comparison to students taking a full-time load. Mary-David and I composed an appeal and sent it to Academic Affairs, and it was approved by Faculty Senate in March.

Proposed Improvements to the Committee: A continuing challenge in this committee is the need to review appeals and submit votes during breaks and outside of faculty members' contract periods. Students undergoing the appeal process are required to meet with their advisor to complete the appeal, which also presents challenges during breaks and holidays. We discussed the idea of removing that requirement to help expedite the process, but it was decided by the committee that input from an advisor who personally met with the student was too valuable. Members of the committee seemed to unanimously agree that serving on the committee implied flexibility outside of normal work hours.

A final challenge that was addressed was the difficulty associated with making decisions on appeals that are not written or presented professionally. Many appeals are hand-written and are not composed with proper grammar. I met with Mary-David Fox to discuss potential edits to the appeal form, such as: Requiring typed responses, offering an expectation of how much time students should spend writing an appeal, and recommending use of available writing resources. However, since students on probation or not admitted to the university are not allowed to use the university's resources, we decided to not implement this policy.

Moving forward in 2022-2023: I will be rotating off the committee and was nominated to serve on Academic Affairs. Dr. Shuang Hundley was also scheduled to rotate off the committee but decided to stay and run for Chair again. The committee held a vote and Dr. Shuang Hundley was unanimously selected to serve as Chair for the 2022-2023 school year. I met with her briefly to share the responsibilities of Chair, answer questions, and offer advice.