Date:   13 May 2024
To:       Academic Council
From:  Advisory Committee on Academic staffing (ACAS)
RE:      Annual report to Council

**What has ACAS been up to the past year?**
Broadly reimagining its role beyond ranking of solicited tenure-track proposal requests.

This academic year ACAS, in collaboration with department/program chairs and the Provost’s Office, has continued to redefine (within the limits of the legislation language constituting this committee of Academic Council) the committee’s goals and workflow. ACAS has established new lines of dialog and collaboration by: surveying department chairs, designing divisional meetings for brainstorming curricular aspirations beyond the departmental level, and initiating conversations with CCAP.

We have learned that there is a structural gap for sustained faculty input into the planning and staffing of our curriculum beyond the department level. While ACAS will continue to solicit and review tenure-track proposals as part of our advisory role to the Provost’s Office, we see the committee’s work to continue to more holistically and collectively collect and represent faculty viewpoints on our College curriculum. More broadly, ACAS has a singular purview to think long-term and widely, beyond the unit level, to allow faculty governance to invest in curricular matters more concretely and comprehensively, beyond concerns over staffing year-to-year, which only address the harried status quo.

To address these concerns ACAS has been thinking in “new ways”:

1. **Focusing on staffing requests over a longer timeframe: a shift from “needs” to “priorities.”** We’ve helped to lengthen the time frame for envisioning tenure-track hiring, seeking proposals from programs and departments within a broad 3-5 year window. This shift helps with longer-term planning for curriculum beyond year-over-year considerations, which are by definition short-sighted and already covered by yearly staffing requests to the Provost’s Office.
2. **Facilitating curricular collaboration across programs and divisions,** in part by sharing common curricular areas of expertise, goals, and themes back to the community
3. **Considering faculty staffing and curricular priorities collaboratively** and broadly, not solely at the department level.

To make good on these new ways of thinking, we have woven into our committee’s workflow a few new initiatives. **We wish to thank both department chairs/program directors and the Provost’s Office for all of their engagement with ACAS this academic year.** We have striven to make all of these interactions transparent by sharing widely working documents from meetings with the community.
Key initiatives

1. **Instituted fall divisional meetings**: This was an initiative started last year by ACAS, and we have refined our vision for these meetings this year. Our goals for these meetings are to activate and facilitate cross-department and cross-program conversations about the curriculum and staffing, and identify emerging areas for collaboration. We received positive feedback on these divisional meetings and would like to organize more meetings next fall.

2. **Surveyed chairs** about their current and long-term staffing plans to obtain a more holistic picture beyond the requests for tenure-track hires. This initiative was started last year, and we have continued to refine the survey. *We shared the results with chairs* to foster big-picture thinking (and collaborative opportunities).

3. **Worked with the Provost’s Office to formalize and structure different “levels” of joint faculty appointments** (affiliated, associated, or joint) and what the benefits and expectations of these titles entail for those involved.

4. **Ended the practice of “ranking” proposals** for new tenure-stream hires and **developed new approaches to evaluate proposals**. Instead, ACAS faculty read and evaluated proposals holistically and advised the Provost’s Office along multiple dimensions of consideration from the proposals submitted in light of other contextual information, including those provided by the proposals themselves. This year ACAS’s report back to the Provost’s Office was a 6-page document full of feedback not merely centered on evaluation of each department by department.

However, we do want to assure the faculty that we relayed our thoughts about departments and programs in desperate need even though the Provost’s Office announced that they do not expect to authorize additional searches to be conducted in 2024-25 over and above the nine already authorized. However, the Provost’s Office may pre-authorize searches to be run in subsequent years. (Note: The lines previously approved include Biological Sciences; Economics; English and Creative Writing; Environmental Studies; French, Francophone and Italian Studies; and Spanish; in addition, two additional joint-hire searches were approved for 2024–25: Africana Studies with Psychology; Women’s and Gender Studies with another department to be determined).

6. **Course tagging**. One concrete proposal ACAS has generated, through conversations with chairs at Divisional Meetings and in collaboration with CCAP, LTS, and the Registrar, is to begin a process of “tagging” courses on Workday, along the lines of interdisciplinary fields mentioned in those meetings. Highlighting these cross-cutting fields of interest will encourage greater visibility of existing expertise across the College, and suggest areas of collaboration between programs and departments.
Perhaps more importantly, tagging can render these themes more visible to our students. Often, students are unaware of existing areas of expertise within and beyond departmental websites or majors. We are expecting this project to continue in the fall semester with continued consultations and refinements; we thank all who have shared their views on this process and its desired outcomes. We expect the number of tags to be somewhat fluid. We also would like to adopt a principle that in order for a course to be tagged with a theme, at least 50% percent of the course content would need to be devoted to the tagged theme. We are also considering adding tags that might highlight the expertise in humanistic sciences, which some faculty believe is under-represented in the “emerging areas” tags developed through Divisional Meetings.

7. Closer collaboration with CCAP and other Committees of the Council. The work of ACAS amplifies faculty voices. This academic year, we held the first ever joint meeting between CCAP and ACAS. We explored many topics, including the possibility of creating a joint task force drawing from the two committees so that there would be better through-lines of communication and coordination, as both committees are focused on faculty staffing and curriculum, areas with a great deal of overlap and mutually determining considerations. Further conversations are needed in terms of what sort of model would best allow for more integration.

A final note about committee structure: ACAS functions well in its current membership with all voices of the teaching faculty represented. This committee’s work, if it truly has aspirations to think both broadly and deeply about our shared curriculum, needs all of our members who offer curriculum to our students at the table with us. We hope that this structure will be valued and preserved in the coming academic year.