

AN INTRODUCTION TO THE CALS ACADEMIC PLANNING COUNCIL

Updated August 2021

The system of Academic Planning Councils across the UW-Madison campus serves as the primary shared governance backbone for many decisions and policies at the university. Because of this, it is important to understand the full role of APCs and how they operate and interact with other groups.

Academic Planning Councils were first mandated in Faculty Policies and Procedures (FP&P) in the 1990s, in an effort to align governance procedures campus-wide. Each school and college was charged with developing an Academic Planning Council (APC), and a University Academic Planning Council (UAPC) would serve at the campus level. FP&P established the system of APCs, defined their basic purpose, and outlined some minimum expectations (including periodic self-studies), but left much of the specific membership structure to the schools and colleges.¹ The most recent review of the CALS APC was submitted in spring 2021.² The current membership structure and members list appears on the CALS APC website at <http://apc.cals.wisc.edu/members/>.

It is important to remember that members are elected or appointed not to advocate for an individual department or unit, but to represent a segment of the college in deliberations that seek to serve the best interests of the college as a whole, as well as the health of the university in which we function. Members are thus encouraged to communicate frequently with colleagues in the areas they represent, and to “check departmental hats at the door.”

The APCs were designed to advise the dean on “programs and budgetary planning” including the review and approval of academic programs. But most, if not all schools/colleges, kept their curriculum committees as well, which operate in coordination with the University Curriculum Committee.³ The division of labor is not always sharply defined, but in broad terms, APCs handle program-level issues: degrees, majors, and certificates – proposals for new ones, reviews of and changes to existing ones, and the like. Curriculum committees by contrast generally focus on course-level proposals and questions, though there is plenty of grey area between issues properly dealt with by the CALS APC versus the CALS Curriculum Committee (to say nothing of other committees, such as the Scholastic Policies and Actions Committee, the Research Advisory Council, and so forth). Not infrequently, both the Curriculum Committee and the APC will be asked to weigh in on a decision. For example, another college proposes a new major that bears some disciplinary connection to an existing program in CALS, and that seeks to draw on CALS course offerings. The CALS Curriculum Committee will be asked to provide comments to the APC based on their familiarity with course-level issues, but APC is the governance body that must respond to the request.

¹ https://policy.wisc.edu/library/UW-803#Pol803_3_08 (School/College APCs) and https://policy.wisc.edu/library/UW-806#Pol806_6_52 (University APC)

² The 2019-20 CALS APC Self-Study Review is posted at <https://apc.cals.wisc.edu/wp-content/uploads/sites/35/2021/08/CALS-APC-Self-Study-Report-2020-Final.pdf?x61351>

³ https://policy.wisc.edu/library/UW-806#Pol806_6_53 (University Curriculum Committee)

The Academic Planning Councils also, in spite of their names, deal with non-academic issues: strategic planning, policy questions, administrative reorganizations, or any other matter on which the dean chooses to seek their advice. “Academic” in the APC context thus refers broadly to the mission of the institution – a reference to academia rather than academic program offerings only.

Because of the diverse nature of the issues that come before the APC, it is difficult to describe a typical meeting or the preparation required of the council members. In broad terms, however, the agenda for each APC meeting is set by the Office of Academic Affairs in consultation with the dean and circulated to committee members at least a week in advance of each meeting, along with any documentation available for each agenda item. Any member of the college community (including members of the APC) may propose items for the agenda. The meeting itself may include a presentation by individuals connected to an agenda item, and time is available for the council members to ask questions of such presenters. Council deliberations and votes are generally taken after guests have departed, though APC rarely goes into formal closed session. In order to ensure that council members have time for reflection and the opportunity to consult other members of the college community, the council frequently opts to see significant proposals twice – once to hear an introduction to the topic (to prepare members to seek input from their colleagues), and a second time for deliberation and decision-making – but this two-meeting practice is not a strict requirement. Many APC agenda items require a vote, but the council may also be asked to provide advice or commentary without a formal vote, and some agenda items are informational only.

Familiarity with Robert’s Rules⁴ and with campus and federal guidelines is helpful for council members, but one role of the staff assigned to the committee is to serve as a resource on the basics of parliamentary procedure and applicable regulations. Committee members may wish to access campus data related to the issues under deliberation. The office of Academic Planning and Institutional Research is the central campus repository for most data, and also produces more in-depth reports on specific topics of interest to campus. Most of these resources are publically available at www.apir.wisc.edu. The CALS APC website also provides ready access to CALS-specific data: <http://apc.cals.wisc.edu>. CALS APC members may also request additional data or summaries that may be of use to the council’s deliberations.

The primary purpose of the APC is to advise the dean, but participation on the council also provides an excellent opportunity to learn more about the college and how it functions, and can provide a useful foundation for future service and leadership experiences. We look forward to working with you in the year to come and hope that you will find your service engaging and rewarding.

⁴ “Robert’s Rules of Order Newly Revised, 11th edition, shall be the default parliamentary manual for all meetings of school/college faculties, but in case of conflict between Robert’s and any rules adopted by those bodies, the latter shall take precedence.” (https://policy.wisc.edu/library/UW-803#Pol803_3_04)