

CALS Academic Planning Council (APC) Self-Study Review 2013-14

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Submitted February 3, 2014

Approved by full APC for circulation February 18, 2014

Summary of Recommendations:

The subcommittee recommends that the CALS APC should:

- improve communication of APC activities through eCALS, an annual report of APC activities, and more frequent interactions between APC members and their constituent departments.
- enhance the representation of faculty and academic staff in CALS by reorganizing the existing APC divisions and increasing the number of faculty representatives.
- continue to play an active advisory role in prioritizing faculty hires with modifications to the process to remove apparent conflict of interest.
- improve the utility of the APC website by making it easier to find on the CALS home page and by keeping the provided information more up-to-date.

Report of Subcommittee Activities:

The self-study subcommittee of the CALS APC was convened on October 8th, 2013. Initial activities involved the collection of data from multiple sources including summary tables of total FTE and teaching responsibilities of all CALS departments. A meeting was convened of past and present APC members and the subcommittee also met with Dean VandenBosch. Past self-study reports of the CALS APC (2000, 2005) and the current operating procedures and recent self-study reports from the College of Letters and Sciences and College of Engineering APCs were reviewed. An online survey was sent to all CALS faculty and academic staff (designated "Survey A") and a separate survey was sent to CALS Deans, department chairs, and current and past APC members (2005-present) ("Survey B"). Finally, the APC was the focus of discussion at the December 17th, 2013 CALS All-College Meeting. This report and its recommendations are the outcome of consideration of these data. The results of the surveys will be used to guide the following discussion in this report. Input from the Dean, APC members, and other sources were also factored into our recommendations.

Survey Results:

Survey A respondents:

A total of 270 responses from 865 total faculty and academic staff (31%) were received. Of these, 34% were faculty (92), 64% were academic staff, (173) and 2% (5) were classified staff. The results are presented in Table 1 and Table 2 for faculty and academic staff, respectively.

Table 1. Survey A results for faculty.

Question	% yes	% no	No opinion
Are you aware of the existence and function of the Academic Planning Council?	87	13	-
Does the structure of the APC provide adequate representation of faculty and academic staff in CALS?	58	42	-
Do the current mechanisms serve to adequately communicate the actions and activities of the APC?	68	32	-
Should the APC continue to rank requests for release of faculty positions?	62	24	14

Table 2. Survey A results for academic staff.

Question	% yes	% no	No opinion
Are you aware of the existence and function of the Academic Planning Council?	51	49	-
Does the structure of the APC provide adequate representation of faculty and academic staff in CALS?	71	29	-
Do the current mechanisms serve to adequately communicate the actions and activities of the APC?	59	41	-
Should the APC continue to rank requests for release of faculty positions?	24	3	63

Survey B respondents:

A total of 46 responses from 66 total faculty and administrators (70%) were received. Of these, 63% were current or former APC members, 39% were current or former department chairs, and 13% were from the Dean/Associate Deans. These total more than 100% due to some respondents identifying themselves in more than one group. The results of Survey B are shown in Table 3.

Table 3. Survey B results for APC members, department chairs and Deans.

Question	% yes	% no	No opinion
Is the APC an effective governance vehicle in CALS?	63	37	-
Does the APC fulfill its mission as stated in FP&P 3.08?	63	37	-
Do adequate mechanisms exist to bring matters before the APC?	86	14	-
Do the current mechanisms serve to adequately communicate the actions and activities of the APC?	55	45	-
Should the APC continue to rank requests for release of faculty positions?	39	54	7
Does the structure of the APC provide adequate representation of faculty and academic staff in CALS?	29	71	-

Issue 1: Awareness and communication of APC activities:

Of the 270 Survey A respondents, 39% were unaware of APC activities. This high number primarily reflects the large number of academic staff (173) who responded to the survey. Forty-nine percent of academic staff were unaware of the APC while only 13% of faculty did not know about the group. Those respondents who were familiar with the APC became so from a variety of sources including department meetings and discussions with colleagues.

Of the 270 Survey A respondents, 38% held the opinion that current mechanisms do not adequately communicate APC activities. More faculty believed that current mechanisms were adequate than did academic staff (68 vs. 59%). Of Survey B respondents, 45% believed that the current mechanisms are inadequate. Thus, awareness of the APC and its activities continues to be an issue for improvement. Suggestions made by respondents to improve communications included adding a specific link to a summary of APC activities on eCALS, and periodic emails to the college relaying the agenda and when minutes are posted.

Example survey responses:

“More proactive follow up via email or visit to department”

“A link to the monthly minutes posted in eCals would be a great reminder to track the important topics taken up by the APC.”

“While meeting minutes are available on a website, it may be useful to remind all faculty and staff about this once a year.”

“APC members should develop communication links with all departments so that they are representing all faculty within their area - not just their specific department interests.”

Recommendations:

Given the abundance of email traffic that we all face, relying on APC-specific emails is not recommended as these are likely to be ignored. Rather, highlighting APC activities on eCALS would be an effective method of communication and we recommend that eCALS always include a link to the APC website. The APC should also prepare annual reports of major activities to post on eCALS and the APC website so that it is readily available to all faculty and staff in the college.

We also recommend that current APC members work to improve communications with their respective constituent departments regarding our activities. Some orientation should occur at the first APC meeting of each academic year to introduce APC activities and responsibilities to new members and highlight the importance of communication with constituents and how to deal with real or perceived conflicts of interest.

We also recommend that each department that does not have a sitting representative on the committee be asked to designate one individual as the contact person through which that APC division member can communicate. Meeting agenda and approved meeting minutes should be sent to those individuals as they become available. Finally, it would be helpful for APC members to obtain the meeting agenda earlier than current practice to allow forwarding to represented departments so that discussions in APC meetings can better address potential impacts on all represented groups.

Issue 2: Representative structure of APC.

Of the 270 faculty and staff respondents, 33% held the opinion that the current structure of the APC did not provide adequate representation of faculty and academic staff across the entire college. This opinion was also held by 71% of APC members, department chairs and Deans. Many respondents felt that academic staff were underrepresented on the APC. A second major theme was that faculty in the social sciences-related departments were underrepresented. A third common opinion was that the membership of the APC should better reflect the number of faculty in each division.

As many phrased the question, should the APC be analogous to the US Senate, where each state (department) gets equal voice, or the US House of Representatives where the number of seats reflects the population of each state (department)? Opinions on this point varied widely. Solutions suggested by respondents ranged from including one member per department, to eliminating the department-based divisions altogether and moving to a discipline-based system (e.g. biological sciences, physical sciences, humanities/social sciences). The departments that are currently clustered

in each division were also questioned. Specifically, it was asked if the existing groupings make sense with regard to current research and teaching activities of the component departments?

Clearly, great disparities now exist in the representative structure of the APC. Representation currently ranges from 1 APC member per 75 faculty in the most populous division (Basic Sciences) to 1 representative per 22 faculty in the smallest division (Food and Nutrition). The mean representation in the current structure is 1 APC member per 43 faculty.

Example survey responses:

"More academic staff representation."

"More social science positions to add much needed balance. As is, the APC is stacked in favor of some departments at the expense of others."

"Size should be factored in so that basic science departments have greater representation."

"It would be worth reviewing the logic for the categorization of "fields." The traditional categories are anachronistic and don't adequately reflect contemporary realities."

Recommendations:

The subcommittee considered several scenarios to provide for more equal representation across the college. The subcommittee strongly favored the department-based divisions as opposed to broader discipline-based units because the former system allows for clearer avenues of communication between each APC member and his/her constituents.

Under a department-based scenario, the subcommittee did not favor an APC where all departments have one representative because the group would then number over 20 members counting the extension and academic staff representatives and it does not resolve issues raised regarding divisional representation or ratio of faculty per representative.

After much deliberation, the subcommittee devised a new structure provided in Table 4. Specifically, departments deemed to have similar research and teaching missions were combined into five new divisions. Because the subcommittee believed that the names of divisions can be misleading and potentially divisive, we simply numbered the divisions 1 through 5. We propose that each of the five divisions elect two (Divisions 1-4) or three members (Division 5). This proposed structure provides very similar representation per division. Representation would range from 1 APC member per 26 faculty (Division 3) to 1 APC member per 29 faculty (Division 5). Increasing the number of faculty representatives from 7 to 11

also allows more departments to be represented on the APC and provides a greater diversity of opinions.

Specifically, this system provides greater representation for social science and basic sciences departments and, we believe, provides a better organization of component departments based on research/teaching activities. We further propose that representatives within a division cannot come from the same department at any one time and that the departments within each division establish a rotation system so that smaller departments can have representatives on the APC in a periodic fashion. We believe that these changes will greatly improve APC representation and increase diversity while limiting the group size to a manageable and productive level.

Academic staff are currently represented by one elected member and one member appointed by the Committee on Academic Staff Issues (CASI). While the elected member has full voting status, the policy regarding the CASI-appointed member is not clear. We recommend revising the current APC policy to state that both academic staff members have full voting status. This change would formalize the presence of two academic staff representatives on the committee.

With recent changes in human resources policy, the subcommittee considered adding classified staff representatives to the APC. At this time, FP&P 3.08 specifically limits APC membership to faculty and academic staff so this is not possible. If and when FP&P 3.08 is revised, we recommend adding one or more classified staff members. Finally, we considered the possibility of increasing extension representation but we do not recommend increasing that number; divisional members whose departments engage in extension activities also represent extension on the committee.

Thus, our recommended revised composition is as follows:

- Division 1- 2 members
- Division 2- 2 members
- Division 3- 2 members
- Division 4- 2 members
- Division 5- 3 members
- Extension- 1 member (any department)
- Academic staff- 2 members
 - Both elected, one appointed to CASI

Total = 14 members (current = 10 members)

Terms will be staggered and of three year duration. With this revised structure, a quorum would met by any eight members.

Table 4. Proposed new divisions for APC representation.

Division	Department	Faculty
Division 1	Animal Sciences	16
2 representatives	Biological Systems Engineering	16
	Food Science	10
	Dairy Science	13
		Division total = 55
Division 2	Entomology	16
2 representatives	Forest and Wildlife Ecology	21
	Soil Science	18
		Division total = 55
Division 3	Agricultural and Applied Economics	22
2 representatives	Community/Environmental Sociology	13
	Landscape Architecture	6
	Life Sciences Communication	7
	Urban and Regional Planning	4
		Division total = 52
Division 4	Agronomy	19
2 representatives	Horticulture	20
	Plant Pathology	14
		Division total = 53
Division 5	Bacteriology	21
3 representatives	Biochemistry	32
	Genetics	22
	Nutritional Sciences	12
		Division total = 87

Issue 3. Involvement of the APC in advising the Dean on faculty hires.

Survey results indicated that while the majority of academic staff (63%) had no opinion on this issue, the majority of faculty (62%) thought that prioritizing faculty position requests was a worthwhile activity of the APC. Among administrators and APC members, 39% thought that this was worthwhile and 7% had no opinion. Those in favor of this activity indicated that the APC provided broad perspective of viewpoints from across the college. In addition, the process was thought to be useful in motivating departments to make careful decisions about their needs and future plans.

Among those against this APC role, some felt it was a waste of time for the APC and departments to engage in such an extensive process when few positions were available. For many, this opinion also comes from experience where past Dean's were perceived to ignore APC recommendations. It was widely appreciated that Dean VandenBosch takes the recommendations of the APC very seriously.

Example survey responses:

"The Dean needs to hear the opinions of a broad group of people from across the college in ultimately making her decisions."

"It is the best opportunity to get multiple perspectives, leading to a college-wide strategy."

"The APC is not a representative body and exhibits many strong biases in favor of some departments and disciplines at the expense of others."

"More control should be given to individual departments."

"There have been so few faculty positions available in the past decade that parts of this exercise seem like a waste of time"

"Just have the Dean choose."

Recommendations:

The subcommittee strongly believes that the APC provides an important source of advice to the Dean on hiring priorities in the college and should continue to do so. We also acknowledge that the APC is only one voice in the process and encourage the Dean to consider all sources of information available in making her decisions. We greatly respect the Dean's leadership in the hiring process, but also feel it is important to honor the strong spirit of faculty governance in CALS.

It is the responsibility of APC members to ignore departmental loyalties in these deliberations. To eliminate any apparent conflict of interest during the process, we recommend that APC members abstain from discussing or voting on positions from their respective departments. Having multiple representatives from each division allows such abstention without limiting input from a division.

Issue 4: Adequacy of the APC website.

The subcommittee examined the APC web pages on the CALS website and deemed them to be satisfactory. The only issues of note was that some information on the site was not up-to-date and the site is hard to find on the CALS website.

Recommendations:

We recommend that the APC web pages be closely monitored to be kept as current as possible and that the CALS website managers consider ways to make the site more readily accessible, including a link from eCALS.

