

To: SACUA

From: Aubree Gordon, Chair, Academic Affairs Advisory Committee

Subject: Report on Activities of Academic Affairs Advisory Committee for 2024-2025

Members: Colleen Conway, Robert Deegan, Aubree Gordon, Albert Liu, Rahul Mannan, Emmanuelle Marquis, Frank Pelosi, Mireille Roddier, Jordan Siegel, Kentaro Toyama, Arthur Verhoogt, Jon Wargo

SACUA Liaison: Heather O'Malley

Meeting Dates: September 12 (planning meeting), October 24, November 7 (planning meeting), December 12, January 16 (planning meeting), February 13, March 13, April 22.

Committee Charge

1. Discuss the misalignment of faculty 9-month contracts and the start of the fall term and explore potential solutions.
2. Review of the faculty promotion processes used within the Provost's office.
3. Review the process by which the Provost's office seeks input on leadership positions prior to appointment and brainstorm improvements to enable additional opportunities for input.
4. Explore current practices regarding disability support for faculty and staff and provide recommendations regarding improvement.
5. Continue discussions about faculty challenges concerning childcare and dependent care. Brainstorm potential initiatives.
6. Update on and review of changes to the four SPGs (201.12 Discipline, 201.15 Fitness for Duty, 201.15-01 Temporary Removal of Faculty for Lack of Fitness for Duty, 201.11-1 Sick Leave Plan—Academic Appointments).
7. Discuss the Post-Promotion Advancement and Career Exploration (PACE) Pilot Coaching Program.
8. Provide advice and consultation to the Provost on real-time issues arising; consider with the Provost any further issues or topics brought forward by the AAAC committee members or the Provost for discussion over the course of the year. While coordinating with the Faculty Senate Office to help avoid duplicating work that SACUA has now referred to itself or to another committee, the committee may also continue discussing any issues or topics raised in the committee's most recent annual committee report.

Committee Actions

AAAC met regularly throughout the 2024–2025 academic year, with productive and collegial discussions. Members noted a notably constructive tone in this year's interactions, marked by a

shared commitment, on the part of both the committee and the Provost's Office, to open communication and solution-focused dialogue. This enabled progress on several longstanding and complex issues.

One factor that contributed to the committee's productivity this year was an intentional shift toward more structured coordination and agenda-setting. Early in the year, the AAAC Chair and the Provost's Office agreed to collaborate on setting meeting agendas in advance, allowing ample time for feedback and preparation. Background materials were shared ahead of meetings when possible, and regular check-ins between the Chair and the Provost's Office helped clarify information needs on both sides. These practices enabled meetings to be more discussion-focused, allowed for more meaningful faculty input, and supported a constructive and collaborative atmosphere.

The committee revisited and advanced several ongoing initiatives while also addressing emerging and ongoing challenges. The committee continued engagement on the revision of the Standard Practice Guides (SPGs) related to fitness for duty and temporary removal of faculty. While the initial drafting of changes occurred in the prior academic year, this year's AAAC consistently followed up on the process by requesting updates and seeking a timeline for review. The committee's sustained attention led to a revised draft that was shared at the end of the academic year, allowing for faculty input. However, the revisions came late, not allowing for a true discussion with the Provost's office in an AAAC meeting, and concerns about the revised language of 201.15-1 remain. While members appreciated the opportunity to provide feedback and valued the collaborative dialogue, drafts of revised language on SPGs [201.11-1](#) and [201.12](#) have not yet been provided. Concerns with these two SPGs were raised by AAAC in 2023-2024.

AAAC explored the misalignment between the official 9-month appointment period and the earlier start of the academic calendar, examining its implications for workload, compensation, and compliance. The committee identified preliminary recommendations and is committed to continued engagement on this issue.

A detailed discussion of the Provost's internal promotion and tenure process provided valuable insight into its structure, safeguards, and principles. The committee appreciated the transparency offered and the Provost's openness to faculty feedback. Importantly, the Provost's Office shared that beginning this coming year, faculty will be able to raise concerns about internal reviewers. The committee also welcomed the Office's stated intention to increase public transparency around the P&T process, such as through updates to their website.

Similarly, the committee reviewed the process for gathering faculty input on leadership appointments and reappointments and began identifying ways to expand meaningful faculty involvement while preserving confidentiality and efficiency.

Support for faculty and staff with disabilities was another major focus. The committee received updates on promising disability navigator pilot programs and discussed structural issues related

to Work Connections and Long-Term Disability policies. Committee members worked to connect relevant stakeholders and plan for ongoing improvements.

Additional topics included the expansion of the PACE coaching program, evolving federal challenges related to research funding and DEI initiatives, and strategies to support faculty in the face of harassment or threats.

Information Obtained

- Revisions to key SPGs related to fitness for duty are underway. The University has stated an intention to improve clarity, inclusion, and legal compliance by combining the two existing policies into a single, streamlined document. A draft policy was shared with the committee late in the academic year. While this represents progress, the current version still raises concerns around clarity and implementation, and the committee is in the process of providing detailed feedback.
- The Provost's Office has a structured and confidential process for reviewing all promotion and tenure cases. Trained reviewers and multiple levels of oversight help maintain fairness. Starting this year, a mechanism will be introduced for faculty to raise objections to internal reviewers assigned to their casebooks.
- The Provost's Office expressed willingness to increase transparency around its review process for promotion and tenure, including through updates to its website. While these changes have not yet been implemented, they represent a commitment to further openness.
- A new support model for faculty experiencing harassment has been rolled out, including a single point of contact and integrated case management.
- The disability navigator pilot program has shown early promise within LSA and expanded recently into the College of Engineering. There is interest in campus-wide expansion and possible centralized coordination.
- The processes for faculty input in leadership appointments are robust, but there is room for enhanced outreach and transparency.
- Federal developments, including DEI and indirect cost restrictions, are creating uncertainty. OVPR and the Provost's Office are providing timely information and advocating on behalf of the institution.
- The PACE coaching program is receiving positive feedback and may warrant expansion to additional faculty groups.
- In various combinations, the AAAC, its individual members, and members of other committees worked to seek changes to the way that medical-leave/disability-related decisions are made by the university (i.e., those currently involving Work Connections). Feedback from 30+ negatively affected faculty was collected and conveyed to the CFO, but no action has yet been taken on the claims. When the situation was described to the Provost during an AAAC meeting, she expressed concern and seemed open to further engagement.



Recommendations

1. Implement a formal shift in the start date for 9-month faculty appointments to align with the academic calendar (e.g., August 25), with a transparent transition plan developed in collaboration with faculty governance.
2. With input from faculty, expand the disability navigator initiative across campus, with dedicated support in each school or college and appropriate central coordination.
3. Reevaluate the Long-Term Disability policy, with attention to return-to-work options, financial implications, and support for late-career faculty.
4. Continue efforts to reassess and improve the process for seeking medical accommodations or leave, centering the experiences of faculty and staff and considering best practices from peer institutions. The committee recommends systematic data collection to evaluate the process's performance and transparency, including input from individuals who have interacted with Work Connections. Some AAAC members believe an overhaul of the process is required. At a minimum, an appeal mechanism outside of Work Connections should be established to ensure a fair and independent process.
5. Pilot a formal mechanism for faculty feedback on SPGs, such as a comment portal with section-specific input options and transparent review pathways.
6. Expand opportunities for faculty engagement during leadership appointment processes, ensuring that feedback mechanisms are broadly accessible and transparent.
7. Continue the PACE program with robust evaluation. Explore expansion to additional faculty cohorts, such as junior faculty and clinical tracks.
8. Continue exploring potential initiatives to address faculty needs in childcare and dependent care in 2025–2026.
9. Support the new mechanism allowing faculty to raise concerns about internal reviewers in promotion and tenure cases. Follow up next year on the implementation of this process and the Provost's Office's stated intention to increase transparency, particularly through publicly accessible information on their website.