The Faculty Committee on Academic Standards met 15 times during the 2007-2008 academic year. Its members were: Barbara Borg (Anthropology), Catherine Boyd (Registrar, ex-officio), Lynn Cherry (Undergraduate Academic Services, ex-officio), James Deavor (Chemistry), Christopher Korey (Biology, secretary), Larry Krasnoff (Philosophy, chair), George Pothering (Computer Science), Jamie Shafer (SGA representative), James Ward (Historic Preservation), and Chris Warnick (English).

The committee considered 88 student petitions in all (a 60% increase from the previous year). 54 of petitions asked for late withdrawals. Of these, we approved 40, and denied 12. In one case we approved only a part of a petition and denied the rest; in two other cases, we requested more information, which has yet to arrive. We also received 27 requests to take senior year courses elsewhere. We approved 19 of those, and denied the remaining 8. We also received a number of miscellaneous requests: two for late changes of grades, two for waivers to the rules for language alternatives for SNAP students, one to waive the 62 hours required for Latin honors at graduation, and one to waive the maximum number of transfer hours from two-year institutions. We denied all of these last requests, except for one of the petitions for a change of grade, which was approved.

The previous year’s committee had approved a proposal from John Newell, Dean of the Honors College, and endorsed by Provost Jorgens, for a small reduction in the GPA requirements for Latin honors at graduation, in the light of our new grading system. This proposal was considered at the Senate at the start of the year, and sent back to the committee with a request for more documentation. This year’s committee reviewed and reaffirmed the proposal, and forwarded the relevant documentation to the Senate, which approved the proposal.

At the request of Lynn Cherry, the committee modified the form that chairs use to approve overloads. Requests for overloads were formerly processed by Undergraduate Academic Services, but that task has now been devolved to department chairs. Lynn worried that there were no longer common standards by which overload requests were judged. We therefore added to the overload form a more detailed checklist of questions that Lynn had often used as criteria for evaluating the requests. Chairs are not bound by these criteria; the questions on the form are only to provide guidance in helping chairs to make decisions. The new form was shared with the Senate.

The committee discussed a number of proposals from Jim Deavor: requiring a student to earn a C rather than merely a passing grade in a prerequisite course; limiting the number of Ws a student may have, requiring a student to attend the first day of a class, and a clearer rule against exams in the week before finals. None of these proposals was endorsed by the committee. The committee felt that the first issue was better left to departments, that the second and third proposals were potentially too strict, and that the last was merely a plea that we enforce a policy that we already have (though one that has proven difficult to enforce).
The committee reviewed a proposal from Cathy Boyd to alter the rules for receiving multiple bachelor’s degrees. Under our earlier rules, students who completed two majors, one of which led to the B.A and one to the B.S., would receive two degrees, while students who completed two majors that led either to the B.A. or to the B.S. would receive only one. Under the new policy, double majors will always receive only one degree, unless they have taken at least 30 additional hours, in which case they can receive two. This proposal was approved by the Senate in the spring.

Finally, the committee took up a discussion, prompted by Jeri Cabot, about whether and how disciplinary information should be recorded on a student’s transcript. Traditionally, the transcript has contained only academic information, and disciplinary records are kept separately. But we now have the XF grade, which indicates removal from a course on grounds of academic dishonesty. The committee decided that it was best to proceed cautiously in adding non-academic information to the transcript, but agreed that institutions ought to be able to know when a potential transfer student had been disciplined elsewhere. We therefore decided to work with Jeri Cabot to draft a dean’s certification letter, which would be required of all students wishing to transfer here. The letter asks a previous institution to inform us of any disciplinary violations in the applicant’s past. By proceeding in this manner, we are leaving the transcript alone for now, while concentrating on the question of what we as an institution would like to know about transfer applicants. After resolving this question and seeing how the certification letters work in practice, we can then see if we are being in any way irresponsible by not including further disciplinary information on the transcript. Future FCAS committees should continue to monitor and discuss these issues.

The chair would like to express his gratitude and appreciation to all the members of the committee for their conscientious service throughout the year.

Respectfully submitted,

Larry Krasnoff
Associate Professor, Philosophy
Chair, Faculty Committee on Academic Standards