

## **Academic Standards Committee**

Faculty Senate Annual Report: AY 2025-2026

### **Committee Charge**

The Academic Standards Committee is charged with reviewing the policies and procedures utilized to maintain its academic standards, and to collaborate with Office of Academic Integrity and other relevant institutional groups to make revisions as appropriate. The committee will provide recommendations for educational information/efforts about academic standards for students and faculty, with particular attention given to education for students of differing cultural backgrounds. Finally, they will review historical case data and gauge faculty and student understanding of and thoughts about the Academic Standards case resolution processes to inform efforts listed above.

### **Composition:**

- Six members of the faculty, at least one of whom is a Faculty Senator, from at least four different colleges or schools
- Two representatives from the Provost's Office
- One student government representative
- One GAPSA representative

### **Committee Chair**

Alexandria Zylstra (Costello College of Business)

### **Committee Members**

James De Marco (School of Nursing)

Eric Auld (College of Humanities and Social Science)

Valerie Olmo (College of Science and **faculty senator**)

Michael Hurley (College of Humanities and Social Science)

Courtney Wooten (College of Humanities and Social Science)

Timothy Leslie (College of Science, Provost's Office representative)

LaShonda Anthony (Director, Academic Standards Office, Provost's Office representative)

Carolyn Hoffman (GAPSA representative)

### **Timeline and Meeting Schedule**

The Academic Standards Committee meets every three weeks. In total, the ASC held eight meetings in AY 2025-2026.

## Committee Initiatives & Updates

- The most significant work of the Committee during this academic year focused on revising and updating Academic Standards policies and procedures and ensuring they are housed in the proper location. As some policies were previously located on the website and some in the university catalog, the Committee drafted a single document containing the ASO procedures, which will be housed on the ASO website, and a single document containing all ASO policies. The Faculty Senate approved inclusion of ASO policies in the next university catalog.
- As part of this policy revision process, the Committee changed the faculty requirement to six weeks from initial discovery of the suspected violation. The Faculty Senate also approved this change.
- The Committee adopted a policy requiring faculty to allow students to continue attending class and submitting work, which the faculty must grade and provide feedback on, even if the student is found in violation of a Level 2 case (resulting in an F). The Committee first consulted with legal counsel, who confirmed it was a policy matter, not a legal one.
- The Committee approved a policy addressing outside referrals (people outside Mason who contact ASO with information that they did work for a student). While ASO previously had a policy, it was not clearly written. The approved policy outlines the procedure for ASO to gather information from the faculty member whose course is the subject of the referral, to ascertain the veracity of the referral, and to decide how to proceed. The policy also includes collaboration with ITS if a student's log in information was shared with the referring party, and subsequent referral to Student Conduct if external individuals were given access to Mason systems.
- The Committee approved a 10-year record retention policy for ASO cases. ASO had previously held records for three years, per the Library of Virginia Records Retention rule. This academic year, ASO learned that the three years is a minimum, not a maximum. As such, the committee decided that 10 years would be appropriate, as students engaged as both undergraduate, then graduate programs, or lengthy graduate programs, may be enrolled at Mason for that long.
- As the Committee's charge was silent as to terms of service, the Committee agreed to amend our charge to denote staggered three year terms. This was approved by Faculty Senate's O & O Committee.
- The Committee revised faculty responsibilities in 2.10.5 of the Faculty Handbook to reflect our change from an honor code system to our current academic standards code.
- Other matters addressed by the Committee this academic year:
  - The committee discussed the issue of faculty who sanction a student for suspected cheating without referral to ASO, and determined the mandatory faculty training may be the best place to address such concerns. Additional faculty education by ASO's faculty liaison was also encouraged.

- The Committee discussed whether Level 1 or Level 2 violations should be notated on transcripts (similar to suspension notations). The Committee decided that, since a second Academic Standards violation results in suspension, it would be too punitive to notate first violations, knowing they would permanently appear on the transcript.
- The Committee reviewed ASO data from the prior academic year, including trends, shifts in types of cases post-Covid, and shifts in types of cases post generative AI public release.
- The Committee continues to review and update the ASO training for faculty, which is also scheduled to be mandated for Fall 2026.

**Action Plan (to be addressed in AY 26-27)**

- ASC plans to continue monitoring the implementation of the ASO training for students and faculty.
- Additionally, the committee plans to assist the ASO in how best to educate faculty about the ASO process, beyond the mandatory training that should be implemented by then.
- The committee will continue discussions with relevant university partners regarding graduate versus undergraduate university dismissals for ASO violations.
- The committee will continue monitoring process and outcomes data regarding the new ASO process, making recommendations and revisions as needed.

## APPENDIX A

1. During the past calendar year has the President, Provost, or Senior Vice President (or their respective offices) announced initiatives or goals or acted upon issues that fall under the charge of your Committee? If so, was your Committee consulted by the President, Provost, or Senior Vice President in a timely manner before the announcement or action? If not, do you believe your Committee should have been consulted? Would it have been helpful to have had the input of your Committee from the outset?

Two members of our committee represent the Provost's Office. As such, the Provost's office was responsive and engaged with the work of the committee.

2. Did your Committee seek information or input from the President, Provost, or Senior Vice President or members of their staffs? If so, did they respond adequately and in a timely manner?

Two members of our committee represent the Provost's Office. As such, the Provost's office was responsive and engaged with the work of the committee, including providing guidance on drafting of a policies document, revision of faculty handbook responsibilities, and revision and updating of procedures.

3. Please suggest how you believe the President, Provost, Senior Vice President and/or their staffs might more effectively interact with your Committee in the future, if necessary.

The committee does not have suggestions regarding more effective interactions from these offices.

4. Please relate any additional information you may have regarding interactions between your Committee and the President, Provost, Senior Vice President, or their staff.

N/A