

CPC 2019–20 Report and Analysis of Spring 2020 Staffing Requests

This report covers the CPC's main activities during the 2019–20 academic year, including its discussions of staffing requests. For the most recent CPC report on the curriculum with data on enrollment and related issues, please see <https://sites.williams.edu/cpc/>.

The charge of the CPC is as follows:

The Curricular Planning Committee analyzes the college-wide curriculum, investigating changes over time and exploring questions about its future. The CPC coordinates conversations among academic units as they make curricular plans and staffing requests. It assesses all new curricular initiatives for their long-term curricular and staffing implications and communicates its views to the CEA before they are brought to the faculty for discussion and a vote. The CPC makes its analysis of the curriculum available for faculty discussion. In light of its analysis and faculty input, the CPC makes recommendations to the CAP on the allocation of faculty positions to departments and programs; a summary of these recommendations is made available to the faculty. After the CAP completes its allocation of faculty positions, the CPC and CAP analyze the staffing decisions for the faculty.

Membership of the CPC for the 2019–20 academic year

Elected faculty members: Magnús Bernhardsson (History), Mea Cook (Geosciences), Jeffrey Israel (Religion), Christopher Nugent (Chinese, CPC chair), Zachary Wadsworth (Music), Heather Williams (Biology)

Ex-officio members: Denise Buell (Religion, Dean of the Faculty), David Love (Economics, Provost), Maud Mandel (History, President)

Strategic Planning

Much of the CPC's work in the fall involved meeting with a range of Strategic Planning working groups, including Sustainability, Learning Beyond the Classroom, Governance, Student Learning, and The Future of the Arts at Williams, to discuss the curricular aspects and implications of their work. The committee also met with the chair of Psychology to discuss that unit's proposed move from Division II to Division III. In addition to our regular work of meeting with units who have recently completed self-studies and external reviews (this year meeting only with Asian Studies because of scheduling problems later in the year), we started a working group looking into the possibilities for bringing linguistics back to the college. While this group only met once due to the unusual circumstances created by the spread of the SARS-CoV-2 virus, members of next year's CPC intend to pick up where this year's group left off.

During the spring semester we began our evaluation of staffing requests by meeting with the Committee on Appointments and Promotions for a general discussion of the requests. By our next meeting, the world had changed and it was clear that our evaluation process would have to change as well. We thus focused specifically on which requests might be deemed "mission critical" for their units; that is, we asked whether it would or would not be possible for a unit to continue to mount their curriculum in the near future if the requested position was not filled. We later met again with the CAP to discuss the requests from that particular perspective.

While the CAP ultimately approved only one new request this year, the CPC would like to note that there was reasonable curricular justification for all of the requests we received. That being said, we would also like to emphasize the need for units to have more conversations with other units with overlapping curricular interests *before* composing and submitting their requests. Moving forward in a context that is likely to allow for little or no growth in overall FTE at the college, it is especially crucial for individual units to think about how their own work intersects with that of other units and fits into the larger college curriculum.

The CPC also had a range of discussions about the degree to which it has been able to fulfill the original intentions for the committee. Such discussions have been on-going since the committee was created, but the level of dissatisfaction expressed by some of the elected faculty members as of late has been noteworthy. Perhaps reflecting this, the nominations and elections for some faculty slots for next year's committee were uncontested. We hope that next year's CPC (and perhaps the Faculty Steering Committee) might consider whether the CPC should continue with its present structure and, indeed, whether it should continue at all.

Staffing requests

The CAP and CPC received fourteen requests for tenure-stream appointments (compared with twenty-one in each of the last two years) from eleven units. The requests, a summary of the CPC's discussions, and the CAP's decisions, are as follows:

Anthropology and Sociology

Sociology. This is a request for an expansion position in immigration, transnationalism, and citizenship, with a particular interest in candidates who do comparative work and cover the legal dimension of immigration processes. As the request explains, this position would both build on current strengths, such as law, and allow the department to expand its expertise into important new areas. The request also notes substantial enrollment pressure in sociology courses. While this is most acute for introductory classes, from which dozens of preregistered students must be dropped each term, it impacts upper level courses as well. The CPC was particularly impressed by the contributions such a position would make to the broader college curriculum, in which topics related to immigration are playing an increasingly important role. This position would also substantially increase the geographic scope of offerings in sociology. Finally, the committee also noted support from a number of other academic units who would benefit from such courses. While the CPC did not believe it crucial to fulfill this request this year, it does encourage the unit to continue to look at this as an area in which to expand its curriculum. The CAP did not approve this request.

Biology

Biochemistry. This is a request to replace a faculty member who is retiring. The CPC agreed that there is a pressing need to fill the position soon. Biochemistry is a key component of the Biology major and while there are two other biochemists in the department, they would not be able to teach upper-level courses if forced to take on additional teaching to cover the gaps in the introductory courses. Moreover, courses in biochemistry are also important to the Chemistry major and Biochemistry and Molecular Biology Programs (as noted in a supporting letter from the chair of Chemistry). The CAP did not approve this request.

Computer Science

Computer science. This is a request for two expansion positions, though one is actually a position that was approved last year and resulted in a failed search. These requests are primarily enrollment-driven. Enrollments at all levels of CS have increased dramatically in recent years, as has the number of CS majors. Moreover, a number of other units require or recommend that their students take one or more courses in CS. While the request did not specify a subfield, it did note the importance of machine learning for the department going forward. The CPC recognizes the pressing need for CS to have enough faculty to teach its courses, which are clearly in high demand. At the same time, it encourages the unit to begin to think about what it might consider to be the future limit of its current trend of expansion. The CAP approved the request to redo the search approved last year, but did not approve the request for an additional position.

Economics

Macroeconomics. This is a request for an expansion position in macroeconomics related to emerging-market or developing economies. The unit is particularly interested in such areas as macroeconomic analysis of development policy, open economy macroeconomics, financial development and regulation, and international economics. There is also an expectation for active engagement with the Center for Development Economics. The request argues that while macroeconomics is a key component of the discipline of economics, the percentage of faculty in the unit whose research and teaching is focused on this area has dropped over the last decade. This shift has caused difficulties in offering courses in such areas as globalization and economic stability in developing countries, the functioning of labor markets, and the mutual influence between household economic decisions and society-wide economic conditions. The unit also lacks faculty with methodological expertise in computational macroeconomics, a field of growing importance and complexity. The CPC appreciated the thoughtful curricular argument for this position but did not see a pressing need to fulfill the request this year given current staffing. The CAP did not approve this request.

English

English requests two positions, one for “the Eighteenth Century and British Romanticism” at the assistant professor level and another for “Latinx Literature” at the associate professor level (though the requested search would be “open rank”). Neither of these positions are expansion requests, though the Latinx literature position would represent a new curricular area for the department. As part of these requests, the department indicates that the Latinx literature position is a higher priority for them than is that for the eighteenth century and British Romanticism.

1. Latinx literature. The CPC commends the unit’s ongoing efforts to broaden their curriculum to represent a fuller selection of literature in English than what they have covered in the past. We also appreciate that the department has reached out for input from both Latino/a Studies and Romance Languages in formulating their request. At the same time, the CPC would like to see more concrete coordination between units contributing to the Latinx-related curriculum at the college as a whole. LATS recently hired in literature at the senior level and the request from English did not discuss the similarities and differences between that position and their own request. Consultation with both American Studies and Comparative Literature would also be helpful in articulating the role this position could play in the larger curriculum. The CAP did not approve this request.

2. Eighteenth Century and British Romanticism. The curricular justification for this position is very strong. In recent years the college's offerings in literature have increasingly focused on the modern and contemporary (i.e. twentieth and twenty-first centuries). In the last decade the English Department has seen five faculty whose research and teaching focused on pre-twentieth century materials retire. Other faculty who work on earlier periods have shifted their teaching more towards the modern and contemporary. In that same time, there has been only one new hire whose research and teaching focuses on pre-twentieth century materials. The requested position could thus play an important role in allowing the English Department to continue to teach different periods in the history of English literature while also increasing the college's overall offerings in the pre-modern. At the same time, the request did not indicate any discussion with other units that would have an interest in the period and topics this position would cover. Indications of support from such units as History, Music, German/Russian, Art, Comparative Literature, and Science and Technology Studies would help situate this position in related parts of the overall college curriculum. The CAP did not approve this request.

Environmental Studies

Contemporary agro-food systems. This is a request for an expansion position for an interdisciplinary social scientist whose research and teaching combines qualitative and quantitative methods in the study of problems facing agricultural producers and production. Possible areas of specialization would include food sovereignty, climate adaptation, developmental policy, and agrarian change. The unit expresses a particular interest in candidates who use GIS and focus on the Global South. The CPC found the curricular argument for this position to be very strong: food studies is an important aspect of environmental studies that currently has little coverage at the college but enjoys consistently robust student interest. There is also a demonstrated need for faculty focused on environmental policy to work with the many thesis students interested in this area. However, because the unit has an external review coming up soon, we suggest the unit undertake a fuller discussion of future directions and development in that context before doing a search. The CAP did not approve this request.

Geosciences

Mineralogy and petrology. This request asks to replace a faculty member retiring at the end of the 2020–21 academic year. The fields of the proposed hire are foundational for the unit's curriculum and for students who intend to continue in the geosciences, either in the workforce or graduate school. There are also important intersections with the study of chemistry, computer science, astronomy, physics, and environmental studies at the college. The CPC found the curricular arguments for this position to be strong and further agrees that there is a pressing need to fill the position soon. The CAP did not approve this request.

History

Medieval Europe and the World. This request asks to replace a faculty member who has left the college. This same request was made last year; in both cases the CPC considered it to be very strong. The request notes that medieval Europe has long been a key part of the curricula of both History and the college. Courses in this area have had consistently high enrollments and the thousand-year span of this period cannot be adequately covered by other faculty in the unit. Moreover, courses on medieval Europe are important for many different fields and disciplines at

the college. The CPC regards the fact that this position has been slightly reconfigured to focus more on contact with non-European cultures and societies as a positive development that accords with changes in the field. At the same time, there is some concern about the vagueness of the term “world” as used here. There are many non-European cultures and societies (such as those in the Americas and large parts of Asia), with which Europe had little or no contact in this period. That concern aside, a number of CPC members agreed that an understanding of the medieval period is crucial for any informed understanding of the transition to modernity worldwide. Others noted that the college curriculum currently skews very heavily towards the modern and even contemporary, which makes filling this position especially important. The CPC did not believe it crucial to fill this position immediately, but recognizes that it should be filled soon. The CAP did not approve this request.

Latina/o Studies

Latinx studies. This request asks to replace a faculty member who has left the college with a hire with expertise in interdisciplinary social sciences. Some areas of particular interest include urban ethnography, urban studies, inter-racial and inter-ethnic relations, with attention to such issues as migration, gentrification, the built environment, and community activism and organization. The request argues that these areas, a number of which were covered by the faculty member who left the college, are fundamental to any program in Latina/o studies. Moreover, the low number of dedicated FTE in Latina/o Studies at the college makes it difficult to teach the core curriculum of the concentration, let alone offer a suitable range of electives. The CPC found the curricular arguments convincing and the current staffing needs to be urgent. The CAP approved this request.

Psychology

Psychology requests two positions: one in clinical psychology to replace a retiring faculty member and another in psychology and the law.

1. Clinical psychology. This request for a position in clinical psychology argues that with the coming retirement of a faculty member in this field, the unit will no longer be able to staff adequately courses in psychotherapy and treating—areas of substantial student interest in terms of both coursework and research. Moreover, courses in these areas strengthen connections between Psychology and a number of other units and fields at the college, including Africana Studies, Asian American studies, Latino/a Studies, Public Health, Neuroscience, and Women’s and Gender Studies. Because of demographic trends in psychology, the unit also sees this as an opportunity to increase the diversity of their faculty. The CPC found the curricular argument for this position to be strong and also sees a pressing need to fill this position soon. The CAP did not approve this request.

2. Psychology and Law. This is a request for a specialist in psychology and law. The request notes the importance of this sub-discipline in the field, and that it has traditionally been in demand among students at Williams and elsewhere. It further argues that such a position would present numerous opportunities for interdisciplinary connections with such fields as sociology, history, economics, and political science. Courses in psychology and the law are of particular importance to the Program in Justice and Law, but would also potentially contribute to a number of other units as well. The CPC found the curricular argument for this position to be strong, but

would have appreciated more evidence of communication with other units. The request does include letter of support from the chair of the Justice and Law Studies Program, but there are a number of other units at the college with related coursework and research interests, including Anthropology and Sociology, History, and Religion. The CPC did not see a pressing curricular need for this position this year. The CAP did not approve this request.

Science and Technology Studies

This is a request for an expansion position in the study of science, technology, and society with a particular interest in a scholar whose teaching and research integrates two or more of the college's curricular divisions. Possible areas of focus include the political and social dimensions of biomedicine; data and algorithms; social media; and feminist, postcolonial, and critical-race approaches to STS. Despite lacking any tenure-stream faculty positions, the STS program has grown substantially in recent years through the work of visiting faculty and faculty in other units. Building off of the 2018 CPC working group report on STS, the request argues (as does that report), that hiring tenure-stream faculty is crucial if the STS program is going to continue to exist, let alone develop. With the departure of the visiting faculty member most responsible for the revival of STS in recent years, this need is all the more pressing. As the request notes, the study of science and technology is deeply interdisciplinary and of particular importance as an increasing number of students at the college major in Division III fields. The STS Program may also play an important part in work growing out of the recent Strategic Planning Initiative. The CPC found curricular argument for this request to be very strong. The CAP did not approve this request.