

**Annual Report  
Committee on Academic Standing  
2008-2009**

Voting Members of the Committee in 2008-2009:

Stephen Lassonde, Deputy Dean of the College, Chair  
Robert Emlen, Professor of American Studies  
Julie Kauer, Professor of Molecular Pharmacology, Physiology & Biotechnology  
Claire Kenyon, Computer Science  
Melinda Rabb, Professor of English  
Michael Pesta, Registrar  
Karen Krahulik, Associate Dean  
Kathleen McSharry, Associate Dean

The Committee on Academic Standing meets eleven times a year to discuss policy issues and to review petitions from undergraduates seeking exceptions to the academic regulations. During 2008-09, the Committee reviewed and ruled on 150 petitions (see Appendix A for a listing of petitions by type). These petitions do not include requests approved by the Committee to take a Leave of Absence, to Study Abroad, to transfer credits from other universities to Brown, to take a reduced course load, to enroll in non-studio arts courses at RISD, to take courses with partially overlapping meeting times, for extra-semester permission, or to complete graduation credits in Brown's summer session.

Additionally, on two days in January and two in June the Committee reviews the academic progress of all students in the College to determine the academic standing of all currently enrolled students, designated as "Good Standing," "Warning," "Serious Warning," or "Suspension." Attached to this document is a table enumerating all of the petitions acted upon by the Committee from 1999-2009, including the number of students who were on Warning, Serious Warning, and Suspension at the end of each semester over this period. This year the number of students on some form of academic probation has declined for the third consecutive year. In 2003-2004, the year in which the total number of students on some form of academic probation peaked for the years represented in this table, there were, on average,<sup>1</sup> 261 students on Warning, 135 on Serious Warning, and a total of 52 Suspensions for both semesters. In 2008-2009 the two-semester average was 162 students on Warning and 101 students on Serious Warning, and a total of 20 Suspensions.

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<sup>1</sup> The Committee records statistics for each category of academic probation each semester, however, I'm presenting *averages* for end-of-semester standing, each year, to ease the comparison of data points across the years, 1999-2009. Because in recent years the Committee has refrained from Suspending students at midyear (due to the difficulty of notifying students and guardians between the mid-January meeting and the beginning of classes in Spring), most Suspensions are effected in June rather than January, so the total number of Suspensions annually is a more meaningful figure than the average number of Suspensions after the January and June meetings.

In 2008-09 the Committee implemented a new plan for Academic Outreach to ensure that students in academic difficulty would receive timely, appropriate advising. This initiative has several components:

- The Director of Co-Curricular Advising (a position created in the summer of 2008) followed up with all students on Serious Warning to determine whether they had met with a dean after returning to classes in the Fall and Spring semesters. Students who had not met with an academic dean as instructed in their “Warning” letters were contacted to make appointments with a dean to evaluate the nature of their difficulties and discuss their course selection.

- First Year Students taking particularly difficult course combinations (e.g., Organic Chemistry, Physics, and Genetics) were sent messages to inform them about the academic support services available to them.

- Students on Serious Warning were prevented from registering for 5 credits unless they met with and got special permission from a dean to take more than 4 credits during the semester they were on Serious Warning.

- Students who dropped a course during the semester and whose credit total would place them in academic jeopardy were informed of their standing going into the following semester and met with a dean to discuss their situation.

- One of our priorities, beginning in 2008-2009, was to consider how we could support students who have, historically, struggled at Brown by refining their First Year Advising. We gathered information from the Committee’s archives and worked with the Office of Admission to identify students likely to benefit from more attention upon their arrival at Brown. We matched these students with advisors who indicated that they wanted to be paired with students needing more support throughout the year. Two hundred incoming students were identified as needing extra support and attention. They were matched with faculty known to our office as especially conscientious advisors. A subset of sixty students was assigned to 10 “TEAM” (Team Enhanced Advising and Mentoring) Advisors who are participating in a year-long “seminar” that examines best practices in advising underserved students.<sup>2</sup>

### **2009-2010:**

One of our goals during the coming year is to consider how we might prevent students from being suspended when they have difficulty early on in their time at Brown, and their academic problems appear to stem from insufficient preparation for college. In part, we hope that more intensive First Year advising will help, but we are considering the possibility of developing a fourth category of academic probation for these students, which we would name “Extended Serious Warning/Reduced Course Load.” Students

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<sup>2</sup> “Underserved” students are those who have one or more of the following attributes: they belong to historically underrepresented student populations at Brown, are first-generation college students, are from low-income families, or they graduated from high schools that typically send a minority of their students to college.

who would clearly benefit from some skills training (in math or writing, for example) and who are at Suspension level (3 credits below Good Standing) at the end of the Spring semester, would be continued for one semester at Serious Warning, required to take 3 credits (rather than the expected 4) during the following term, and enroll in a skills course tailored to their needs. This would involve the development of a few varieties of skills courses and careful monitoring of these students, but we hope to be able to offer this during next year.

Respectfully submitted,

Stephen Lassonde, Chair  
October 2009