

COMMITTEE ON STUDENT LIFE ANNUAL REPORT – 2008-2009

The Committee on Student Life has jurisdiction and operates in five spheres: (1) it conducts the Wendell Phillips Award competition that culminates in the choice of the undergraduate speaker at the Baccalaureate ceremony; (2) it serves as the hearing panel of first instance in cases brought against student groups for violation of university and school policies and regulations, and as the appeal panel for decisions rendered against individual students by the Dean of Students Office or decisions of the TCU Judiciary regarding individual students and student groups; (3) it oversees the operations of student government, including vetting proposed changes to the TCU Constitution to ensure that the changes would not violate university/school policies and regulations; (4) it collaborates with the Administration in the formulation of the policies and regulations that guide undergraduate life and are set out in the Pachyderm handbook and other publications; (5) it examines, if need be, other aspects of student life on the Medford campus.

The Committee on Student Life met 6 times during the academic year 2008-09.

An initial meeting was organizational, to welcome new members, review the responsibilities of the Committee as mandated by the faculty Bylaws, and preview upcoming activities. New members also participated in a training session with University Counsel Deke Mathieu, to prepare them for judicial hearings.

The Committee's major activities this academic year, under the headings delineated above, were as follows:

(1) A series of meetings were devoted to the Wendell Phillips Award competition. Committee members formulated the questions for the oral and written presentations of candidates, judged the submitted presentations in order to select the finalists, and judged the finalists' oral presentations and chose the winner, Anjali Nirmalan. CSL carries out the Wendell Phillips competition in collaboration with the director of the Office for Campus Life. This year the OCL Director, Joe Golia, because he was new to Tufts and the position, looked to the CSL co-chairs for some guidance on procedures.

(2) The Committee received 2 petitions from students appealing disciplinary decisions made by the Judicial Affairs Officer in the Dean of Students' Office. In both cases, the two faculty co-chairs and the student chair made a determination that there was no valid basis for the appeal and that the full committee would not hear the appeal. This was in accordance with a procedure worked out by a previous chair of the Committee with University Counsel to protect the committee from an undue workload by weeding out cases that did not merit a full hearing. In these instances, the decision by consensus of the chairs is regarded as constituting an appeal. A third appeal petition, of a TCU Judiciary decision to reject a complaint brought by a student against the Elections Commission for upholding the validity of a student vote on several amendments in Spring 2008, was withdrawn after CSL invalidated the vote (see Item (3) below).

(3) The Committee held an open session to hear arguments regarding several referenda to amend the TCU Constitution: first, to allow the TCU Senate, rather than the student body as a whole, to decide which groups would be given community representative seats on the Senate; second, to add a seat for an historian on the TCU Judiciary. These amendments had been put on the student ballot in Spring 2008 without being brought to CSL beforehand for vetting. The Committee decided that it was important for such proposed amendments to be brought to CSL beforehand, and instructed the proposers of the amendments—which were now formally approved by CSL—to put them up for a new vote in an upcoming election. The Committee also approved the language of a proposed amendment seeking to insure that amendment referenda are adequately publicized prior to elections and that ballots offer a clear option to abstain, as well as an amendment to add “gender identity and expression” to the provisions in the TCU Constitution banning discrimination..

(4) Because several petitions appealing disciplinary decisions made by the Judicial Affairs Officer leaned on ambiguities in the terminology used for categories of student work (homework, lab reports, papers, etc.), the Committee recommended several changes to the language specifying types of offenses and disciplinary consequences to be put in the Pachyderm and Academic Integrity handbook.

On behalf of the Committee on Student Life.

Calvin Gidney and Steven Hirsch, Co-chairs

CSL Members: Christoph Borgers, Veronica Carter, Clara Chan, Joe Golia, Sam Kounaves, Jenny Lenkowski, Christina Maranci, Emeka Nwabuzor, Bruce Reitman, Brandon Sultan, Andrew Thorne