

Frequently Asked Questions for New Faculty August, 2011

Teaching and Working With Students

Q1. How do I handle student requests to drop or add my course?

A. Although there is no formal “shopping period,” Vassar students have two weeks from the start of the semester to add full-semester courses, and six weeks to drop them. To add your course, a student will need to submit an add slip to the Registrar with your signature and their advisor’s signature — even if that student is on the waitlist.

Students are responsible for the work they have missed if they add your course after the beginning of classes. To drop your course, a student only needs an advisor’s signature. Students who wish to add or drop your course after these deadlines will need permission from their advisor or the Dean of Studies office. You can check the enrollments in your course on the Ask Banner part of the Vassar website (https://secure3.vassar.edu/askbanner/advfac_log.html).

If you feel that adding your course after the first week would put a student behind in his or her work, you have the right to say so. You also can turn away a student who would increase the size of the course beyond the limit set by you and your department. Freshman Writing Seminars are capped at 17 students, and you are required by faculty legislation to keep these courses from over-enrolling. If you have any questions about dropping or adding, contact the Dean of Studies office (x5255 dos@vassar.edu) or the Registrar (x5270 registrar@vassar.edu).

Q2. What do I do if a student does not come to class, falls asleep or seems unprepared in class, is doing substandard work, or is acting inappropriately in class?

A: Any behavior that seems strange to you, or raises red flags, is a good reason to contact the Dean of Studies office immediately (x5525 dos@vassar.edu). If a student misses the first two class meetings without a reasonable excuse, you may contact the Registrar to have that student dropped from the class; but if the semester is underway, and a student is absent for more than one or two class meetings, please consult with the Dean of Studies office. If a student is falling asleep in class, seems unprepared, or is acting in other inappropriate ways, you should contact the Dean of Studies office; you may also want to contact the Dean of Students, D.B. Brown (x5315 brown@vassar.edu), especially if you notice a change in behavior and not just academic performance.

Q3. What do I do if a student approaches me about a learning disability, medical problem, or psychological issue?

A. There are diverse offices on campus that can address a student who has needs beyond those that a professor should handle him or herself:

- If a student discloses a learning disability to you, and if you want to talk with someone about teaching such a student, academic coaching, or legal accommodations, contact the Office of Accessibility and Educational Opportunity (x7584 accessibilityandeducationalopportunity.vassar.edu/.)
- If a student has a medical problem, you should refer him or her to the Vassar College Health Service (healthservice.vassar.edu/), and notify the Dean of Studies office.

- If a student is experiencing behavioral or emotional problems, you might want to refer him or her to Counseling Services (counselingservice.vassar.edu/); you can call on behalf of the student or encourage the student to go. For help in making a referral in a sensitive, effective manner, please see the brochure *A Guide to Making a Referral* (counselingservice.vassar.edu/assets/pdfs/referral-guide.pdf).
- You can also contact the Dean of Students, David B. Brown (x5315 brown@vassar.edu).

Q4. What do I do if a student's behavior leads me to suspect they may be depressed, suicidal, or dangerous to themselves or others?

- A. Contact the Dean of Students (x5315 brown@vassar.edu) and the Dean of Studies Office (x5255 dos@vassar.edu) as soon as possible. In extreme situations, or when a student might become a harm to himself or others in your classroom, you can contact the Security Office (security.vassar.edu/) and/or the Dean of Students, who will put you in contact with Security and also notify the other offices that can help manage student crises.

Q5. What do I do if I suspect academic dishonesty?

- A. The Dean of Studies Office has a protocol for investigating and pursuing breaches of academic integrity. A joint student-faculty committee, the Academic Panel, chaired by the Dean of Studies, considers and adjudicates cases of suspected academic dishonesty. If you believe a student is guilty of an act of dishonesty, such as plagiarism, you should consult the Dean of Studies (x5255 dos@vassar.edu). Your department chair may also have suggestions on how to proceed. It is of the utmost importance that faculty members call suspected offenders to the attention of the dean or chair AND NOT DEAL WITH THE CASE THEMSELVES.

Q6. Where can I receive help on developing my courses and suggestions on effective teaching?

- A. The Learning, Teaching, and Research Center is a unique office that supports student learning AND faculty teaching. The officers of faculty development – the Faculty Directors of Teaching and Research Development – work in concert with the Director of the LTRC and the Dean of Faculty's Office to provide help in course development, effective teaching, integration of teaching and research, and other pedagogical concerns, as well as aiding faculty in achieving their personal best in terms of research and productivity.

Q7. Where can I receive training and support for the use of instructional technology and course Web sites?

- A. The office of Academic Computing Services (computing.vassar.edu/faculty/) employs academic technologists, trained in pedagogy, who can help you match your learning goals with appropriate instructional technologies. They can also co-create websites and other digital publishing platforms. Vassar also uses

Moodle, a digital course management system similar to Blackboard, that is available for every course. Contact ACS for more information, or visit the Moodle website (moodle.vassar.edu).

Q8. What is College policy regarding student and faculty religious observance and possible conflicts with course obligations?

- A. As stated in the Faculty Handbook, instructors are asked to take note of significant religious holy days so that examinations or major assignments do not fall on those days. Students should be told at the beginning of each term that although classes may be conducted on these days, absence for reasons of religious observance is excused, provided students notify their instructors in advance and arrange to make up any missed work. If faculty choose not to teach on any holy day, they must notify their chair and their students at the beginning of the term, and make necessary arrangements for course coverage or make-up sessions.

Q9. What is College policy regarding student athletes and possible conflicts with regular class meeting times?

- A. To the degree possible, competitive athletics events—games, meets, tournaments etc. —are scheduled for times that do not conflict with classes. Given the complexities of scheduling and the distances involved, however, it is not always possible to avoid conflicts. The Athletics Director has established the policy that students' academic appointments and commitments are their first priority. In some instances, however, students may seek permission to rearrange an academic commitment to allow participation in a scheduled athletics event. Faculty members are asked to accommodate such requests if possible, provided students give ample advance notice. Encourage them to let you know about sports-related conflicts at the beginning of the semester.

Q10. If I want students to attend an event in the evening or on the weekend, can I require it?

- A. Many courses at Vassar require additional field work and an occasional trip on the weekends; as long as you state clearly on the syllabus and on the first day of the term that this is a requirement of the course, you can normally expect students to participate. If a student cannot attend for various reasons – health, finances, a competing commitment – you can and should consult with the student and the appropriate Class Dean in the Dean of Studies office.

Q11. What are the College's grading system and standards?

- A. The definition of the letter grades is in the Vassar College Catalogue (catalogue.vassar.edu/academic-information/degrees-and-courses-of-study/evaluation-of-work/letter-grades.html).

Details on a variation of pass/fail grading, designed to encourage students to explore courses outside their comfort zones (the Non-Recorded Option or NRO) is also explained

in the Catalogue (catalogue.vassar.edu/academic-information/degrees-and-courses-of-study/non-recorded-option.html).

Like most institutions, Vassar has seen grade inflation over the past thirty years. A number of faculty are discussing the impact of this trend and possible steps in response. Faculty interested in a detailed breakdown of grades by department and course level can obtain the biennial grade report sent to the faculty by the Registrar's Office.

Q12. When and how are course evaluations administered?

A. Instructors hand out a standard course evaluation in each course at the end of the semester. These are then turned over to the Registrar, and the results are sent to the faculty after the grades have been turned in for that semester.

Q13. How do I gain access to the room where I teach and to the technology housed there?

A. Most classroom buildings and classrooms are open and unlocked during business hours; in some cases, classrooms might be locked if they house particular equipment, or if the building is used after hours. In that case, your department administrative assistant should be able to help you secure a key. Many if not most of the classrooms are "smart" classrooms, outfitted with a "smart" panel that includes a DVD and video player, hook-ups for laptops, and a mini-computer and keyboard, as well as projectors. These are usually unlocked.

Q14. Where can I find funding and logistical support for course-related field trips or guest speakers from off campus?

A. Your department chair is a great place to start; many departments have a designated committee that makes decisions about annual speaking events or field trips. The Dean of Faculty Office and the Dean of the College can also help with securing funding for off-campus guest speakers, and the Dean of the College and Dean of Studies offices have information on off-setting the costs for students going on course-related field trips.

Q15. How do I get help with library-related course projects or instruction for my students?

A. The Library Research Services team is happy to help in planning your course around any research materials; they can also help you in creating interesting assignments and projects that make use of library collections or the enormous databases accessible through Vassar libraries. Contact Deb Bucher, head of Library Research Services (x 5763, library.vassar.edu/services/facultyservices/instruction.html), for more details on customizing library instruction for your course.

Q16. Whom do I contact when my computer acts up or the instructional technology equipment or software dies in my classroom?

A. Vassar Computing, the Computer Store, and Media Resources can offer help with computer tech support (x7224 computing.vassar.edu/). If classroom technology malfunctions, or if you have trouble opening or accessing the technology, you can contact your department assistant or Media Services (x7479) and someone will come to the classroom to assist you.

<http://computing.vassar.edu/>

Q17. What funding is available to support summer student/faculty research?

- A. Many funding opportunities are available for both students and faculty in the summer. In the sciences, the Undergraduate Research Summer Institute provides students the chance to work with small groups in labs with faculty conducting original research; the Ford Scholars Summer Program affords students in the humanities and social sciences a chance to act as apprentices or colleagues in summer research. For more information, see the Faculty Director of Research Development, Christopher G. White (x7836 chwhite@vassar.edu), or contact the Grants Office (grants.vassar.edu).

Q18. What do I do when students ask me to be their advisor?

- A. Advising at Vassar comes in several stripes. All full-time faculty after their first year are expected to serve as a pre-major advisor, supporting new students up until the point at which they select a major. This program is coordinated through the Dean of Freshmen's office. In your department, you can act as a major advisor, advising students on coursework and trajectories within the major (and beyond). Or, you might act as a thesis or special projects advisor, helping see a student through a capstone project in his or her senior year. Advising can be a very rewarding experience and a chance to help shape a student's experience at Vassar. If you feel that you are advising a large number of students, talk with your chairperson about managing advising responsibilities and how to direct students to other potential advisors.

Research and Creative Work

Q1. How do I secure funding for conference travel or research-related travel?

- A. For conference travel funding, submit the application form [\[a\]](http://deanofthefaculty.vassar.edu/docs/Travel-Funding-Request-Form-RE.pdf) (deanofthefaculty.vassar.edu/docs/Travel-Funding-Request-Form-RE.pdf) before the proposed trip and as early as possible. [\[a\]](#) Send the form to your department chair for approval, and then convey it to Melissa Naitza, Coordinator of Academic Administration in the Dean of the Faculty office (menaitza@vassar.edu). For research-related travel, faculty members should apply to the Committee on Research (committees.vassar.edu/research).

Q2. How does conference funding work?

- A. The college reimburses full-time faculty members for expenses in connection with active participation in professional meetings, subject to the availability of funds. If you are presenting at a conference in the United States, you will be reimbursed by the college as funds permit up to \$850. Travel outside the continental United States and Canada will be reimbursed up to \$1,200. If you actively participate in more than one meeting during the academic year, you will receive an additional allowance of up to \$500. Limited funds are also provided for

attendance without participation. ^[a]For extraordinary, high-impact, prestigious, and/or career-changing opportunities that cause your travel to exceed the normal limits, additional funding may be available from the Dean of the Faculty, typically on a matching basis; email or phone the Dean with details. For more information on professional travel expenses please refer to the Faculty Handbook (B. IV. deanofthefaculty.vassar.edu/docs/VassarFacultyHandbook.pdf).

Q3. What resources are available to help me with my research and grant writing efforts?

A. The Director of Grants Administration (grants.vassar.edu) can help you locate appropriate funding and support your grant-writing efforts. The Faculty Director of Research Development (x7836 chwhite@vassar.edu) in the Learning, Teaching, and Research Center can also help with these efforts, as can the Writing Center Director (x7683 maschultz@vassar.edu). The Committee on Research funds faculty research expenses in the following categories: research assistance, test subjects, equipment/supplies/space, copying, travel to research sites, lodging, course tuition, and publication expenses. See the Committee Web site for details (committees.vassar.edu/research).

Q4. How are research assistants recruited and paid?

A. Students who work as research assistants are recruited, hired, and paid through the Office of Student employment (studentemployment.vassar.edu). Your department's administrative assistant and chairperson may have more information on hiring students within your department as well.

Q5. I just received news or confirmation of a major professional accomplishment (grant, fellowship, or award received; new book published; national or international media attention; etc.) Whom do I tell?

A. Email Jeff Kosmacher in the Office of College Communications (jekosmacher@vassar.edu), and let your department chair and the Dean know as well (jochenette@vassar.edu).

Campus Life

Q1. What are some good ways to meet other faculty outside my department?

A. Vassar is a small, close-knit place, and there are many ways to mingle with people beyond your department. You will, of course, meet people through your service work at the college (i.e., committees), and through campus-wide programs. You'll meet them at the Learning, Teaching, and Research Center's regular programs and campus events. The Retreat, the on-campus snack bar centrally located in Main Building, is a good place to mingle with faculty and students, especially during lunch. The fitness programs, administered by Roman Czula in the Athletics department (roczula@vassar.edu) and advertised via regular campus emails, offer free or small-fee fitness classes, from yoga to kickboxing and beyond, and are a great way to meet faculty, administrators, and staff. Eventually, you may want to get involved with a multidisciplinary program in an area of interest to you; contact the program directors (deanofthefaculty.vassar.edu/organization/programs.html) for more information.

The LTRC also funds groups of faculty through the “Faculty Conversations” program. Consider putting together a group of interested faculty around a scholarly, pedagogical, or intellectual passion or interest, and then contact the Faculty Director of Research Development, Chris White (x7836 chwhite@vassar.edu), or the Faculty Director of Teaching Development, Rebecca Edwards (x5675 reedwards@vassar.edu), for details.

Q2.Should I attend faculty meetings?

- A. We think so if you have academic suffrage (see the *Governance* section on suffrage in “By-Laws of the Faculty” for details, deanofthefaculty.vassar.edu/docs/11-12-Governance.doc), but no-one takes attendance. They are a great education in how the College works and an opportunity for you to help shape the College’s future and learn about its past. Sometimes they are good theater, with passionate but mostly civil debates; and sometimes they are dull. But they always end by 5 p.m., and cookies are available! They take place generally on the second Wednesday of each month during the academic year at 3:15 in Rockefeller Hall 300.

Q3.How do I learn about campus and faculty events and activities?

- A. The office of College Communications sends a twice-weekly “Vassar Events” email to all members of the community. You can also find out what’s going on using the online calendar (campuscalendar.vassar.edu/).

Q4.How do I secure funding, reserve a space, and arrange publicity for academic lectures or events by guests from off campus?

- A. Guidelines and Request Forms for academic lecture funding through the Dean of the Faculty office are available online (deanofthefaculty.vassar.edu/docs/Lecture-guidelines-Fall-2011.doc and deanofthefaculty.vassar.edu/docs/Fall-2011-Lecture-Fund-Request.doc). Complete the request form and submit it to the Dean of the Faculty office, with a signature of support from your department chair. View the campus calendar (campuscalendar.vassar.edu/mastercalendar/) in order to make sure that no other lectures or similar activities are scheduled for the time and day you settle on. Once the funding is approved, your department administrative assistant will be able to assist with the arrangements for the event. Funding for your event may also be available from your department or a relevant multidisciplinary program.

Community and Family Life

Q1.Can family members or domestic partners use College library and recreational facilities?

- A. Yes, but they will need a College “family” ID. To obtain the ID, request a form from Mary Eddy in the Dean of the Faculty office (maeddy@vassar.edu). The form will require each person’s name and date of birth as well as your signature. Mary will create an ID number

which you and your family member or partner take to the Card Office next to the Help Desk in the Computer Center to obtain the photo ID.

Q2. How can I find childcare for my young children?

A. Vassar students are a great resource. There are a number of ways of getting in touch with students interested in helping out. You could contact student employment and post an advertisement on their employment bulletin board.

You also could contact the Infant Toddler Center (ITC) or the Wimfheimer Nursery School. Both organizations employ students who like to do additional babysitting. You also can contact local day care centers or preschools and let them know that you need childcare help. The Dean of the Faculty Office has a list of options and basic information about the ITC and Wimfheimer (deanofthefaculty.vassar.edu/faculty/childcare.html).

Q3. What resources are available to help my spouse or partner find employment?

A. The College is a member of the Metro New York and Southern Connecticut branch of the Higher Education Recruitment Consortium, with a searchable database of academic job listings (www.mnyscherc.org/). For online information on jobs available at the College, go to www.vassar.edu/jobs/. The College acknowledges that employees often refer relatives for positions, especially spouses and partners of individuals who are relocating in order to accept employment at Vassar, and considers this a valuable resource in seeking the best candidates. The College encourages the practice of reviewing applications and interviewing relatives who are qualified for particular positions, but we cannot guarantee employment.

Q4. What are some of the most popular things to do off campus in the Hudson Valley?

A. The Hudson Valley offers a host of pleasurable pursuits, whether you are an outdoors enthusiast, a wine connoisseur, a food lover, or a parent with kids. If you are looking to enjoy the outdoors, there is great hiking in the Shawangunks, the Hudson Highlands, or the Catskills, with many trail descriptions available from the NY-NJ Trail Conference (www.nynjtc.org/view/hike_ny). The area rail trails offer beautiful biking, walking, and jogging paths (www.co.dutchess.ny.us/CountyGov/Departments/DPW-Parks/17055.htm, and www.hvrt.org/) and the Walkway Over the Hudson, one of New York's favorite state parks, is located right here in Poughkeepsie (www.walkway.org/). Art lovers will enjoy the Dia Center for the Arts in Beacon (www.diacenter.org/sites/main/beacon) and the Storm King Art Center outdoor sculpture park (www.stormking.org/). Summer theater and music are abundant, including the Hudson Valley Shakespeare Festival (hvshakespeare.org/), Bard College's Summerscape (fishercenter.bard.edu/summerscape/), the Maverick Concerts (maverickconcerts.org/), and New York Stage and Film's Powerhouse Theater (on Vassar's campus: powerhouse.vassar.edu/). Throughout the

year, there are arts events at Bethel Woods (the original Woodstock location: www.bethelwoodscenter.org/), Beacon's Howland Chamber Music Circle (howlandmusic.org/), Poughkeepsie's Bardavon and the Ulster Performing Arts Center (www.upac.org/). Families will like Poughkeepsie's Mid-Hudson Children's Museum (www.mhcm.org/), the Hudson Valley's numerous "pick-your-own" operations (www.hvparent.com/articlepost.aspx?id=972&c=0&t=ARTICLE), and the area's parks and playgrounds, including Bowdoin Park in nearby Wappingers Falls. Garden enthusiasts should check out Innisfree Gardens -- also great for picnics (www.innisfreegarden.com/) -- or Stonecrop (www.stonecrop.org/). History buffs will be interested in the magnificent Hudson River mansions, from those of the Roosevelts and Vanderbilts in Hyde Park (www.nps.gov/vama/parkmgmt/upload/ROVA_Plan_LoRes_2-2011.pdf) to Wilderstein (www.wilderstein.org) and Olana (www.olana.org). There are also various Revolutionary-era and pre-Revolutionary sites around West Point and Newburgh, New Paltz's Huguenot Street Historic District (www.huguenotstreet.org/), and Kingston's Stockade or Rondout Historic Districts (www.fohk.org/). Gourmets will want to check out the Culinary Institute of America's fine restaurants (www.ciachef.edu/restaurants/), the many local farmers' markets (including the Monday/Thursday market on the Alumnae House lawn and the City of Poughkeepsie market at Pulaski Park & the Walkway over the Hudson on Friday afternoons beginning at 3 PM), and the Dutchess and Ulster County wine trails (www.ciachef.edu/visitors/hp/enjoyhv/winetrails.asp). Of course, New York City is readily accessible via a beautiful 90-minute Metro North train ride (as0.mta.info/mnr/schedules/sched_form.cfm).

Q5. Where can I find out more about activities and events in the Hudson Valley?

A. Online information on events in Dutchess County is available at www.dutchesstourism.com/search.asp. Each Friday's *Poughkeepsie Journal* includes an "Enjoy" section with a detailed listing of events and activities in the area.