Minutes of the Faculty Meeting
December 7, 2016

I. Report of the Secretary

With one minor change (a spelling correction in the secretary’s transcription of a comment from the Provost, from “L-o-v-e-j-o-y” to “E-u-s-t-i-s”), the previous minutes were accepted.

II. Reports from College Officers

A. The President’s Report – President Greene opened with three very exciting announcements, two very encouraging updates, and one diplomatically worded but clear reproval for the faculty. The announcements:

1. Julie Millard from the Chemistry Department has been elected to the A.A.A.S., the American Association for the Advancement of Science. Greene characterized the election as “an extraordinary honor,” a sentiment echoed later in the meeting by Provost Kletzer who noted that of the 391 scientists elected this year (37 in the chemistry section), only 3 list their affiliation as a liberal arts college, so this is quite an achievement.

2. Rabbi Rachel Isaacs has been invited by the President to perform a Hanukkah blessing this year, the Obamas’ last Hanukkah in the White House.

3. Later this week, the College will officially announce a major funding gift for the “Buck Environment and Climate Change Lab.” Sandy Buck ’78 described his gift as the largest but more importantly, “the most meaningful” one he has ever made. This, the first Colby Lab, will provide significant new resources for research, teaching, internships, partnerships, and global experiences for members of the community to “live our values” when it comes to the environment.

The news from Admissions is that the results of the first round of Early Decision applications will go out next week. This is a small but important part of the overall applicant pool because it has close to a 100% yield rate. It is, however, open to the criticism that it is typically a pool of high-resource applicants, often lacking with respect to the kinds of diversity we hope to achieve. Our efforts to expand the pool have had some effect – it has grown nearly 50% in the last two years from 307 applicants for the class of 2018 to 452 for the class of 2021 – and it will be our most diverse ED1 group ever. The regular deadline is January 1, but with the Common Application, we have evidence that interest and applicants are running ahead of last year. Additionally, we will have more than 30 Questbridge students coming to Colby next year, meaning that in just two years, Colby has become one of Questbridge’s more significant partners in the project of finding talented students from out-of-the-spotlight locations.

The report of the Global Task Force was discussed at the Committee on Mission and Priorities, and a formal response from the President’s Office is forthcoming. Some action can be taken fairly directly, including the appointment of
someone to fill the to-be-created position of “Dean of Global Engagement.” Ideally, it would be a faculty member, so nominations and applications will be encouraged.

The other update concerned the preliminary results from the Diversity, Inclusion, and Equity Task Force. Karlene Burrell-McRae has already been part of 27 meetings and conversations with over 500 people, and she will talk about these in more detail later. Some issues can be moved on quickly, such as initiating, and then regularly executing, a climate survey. One distressing theme has already emerged: according to many people on the staff, staff-faculty relations are “broken” and they feel neither respected nor well treated. Although Greene reported this in a straightforward, matter-of-fact, and measured tone, the message should have been loud and clear to everyone: *Shame on us!* We talk a pretty good game, but our commitment to diversity, inclusion, and equity cannot be merely a theoretical or classroom matter. *Nostra culpa.*

B. The Provost’s Report – Provost Kletzer took a moment to acknowledge the 14 years of service and leadership given to Colby by Clem Guthro, who will be leaving at the end of March to take up the post of Dean of the Library at Cal State Fullerton. After extended congratulatory applause for Clem, she added that we will have an interim director while we begin the search process for his successor.

Two other announcements followed; Audrey Brunetaux will serve as acting director of the Center for Arts and Humanities next year during Kerill O’Neill’s sabbatical and Joe Reisert has agreed to serve a 3-year term as director of the Integrated Studies Program.

III. Old Business

Two motions introduced by the AAC at the last meeting were ready for action. One concerned the creation of a major in Computational Biology; the other concerned the elimination of the Econ-Math major, along with some requirement changes to two other majors housed in the Economics Department. Neither seemed to need further discussion, and both carried by unanimous voice vote.

IV. Faculty Discussion

Following a request, via the Steering Committee, from several members of the faculty, the floor was opened to discussion of students, immigration, and, especially, the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) policy that was instituted by President Obama but targeted for elimination by the president-elect. Elizabeth Leonard began the discussion with reference to the letter signed by over 100 members of the faculty. She asked for clarification of the provisions for the safety and security of our students in light of the recent political developments. Specifically, she wanted to know the import of Greene’s own letter on the subject, which included the claim that we will “do all in our power” to protect our students: does that mean we have declared ourselves a “sanctuary campus”?

Greene answered by reaffirming that we will respond decisively and appropriately to any changes to DACA that affect our students, but he pointed out
that insofar as there have not in fact been any changes in regards to DACA yet, our responses to what might happen are up in the air. We do not release any information regarding the immigration or citizenship status of our students – unless forced to do so by law. We will obey the law. As for declaring ourselves a sanctuary campus, it is not at all clear what that entails, so it would be premature. (There were, for comparison, similar calls for an official college statement regarding the apparent nominee to head the EPA, calls now obviated by a different candidate to be nominated.) In light of the flak that has already come his way due to the attention his own letter garnered, Greene thought it would be unwise, if not altogether counterproductive, to make anything like a loud statement to the effect that, "We have undocumented students and we are going to protect them!" Except for possibly making us feel better about ourselves, it would have minimal positive effect but it could well have the negative effect of essentially putting targets on the backs of our students.

Greene continued by adding that we provide full financial aid for the students we admit – grants, not loans – and because these involve our private funds, this won't change (barring drastic changes in the law) for students who are not eligible for federal aid because of their immigration or citizenship status. Thus, there should be no effect at all on financial aid. Moreover, Greene added in response to questions from Marilyn Pukkila and Patrice Franko, there are also funds available for textbooks and other needs, and there are counselling resources available for students who may have additional anxiety and stress concerning either themselves or friends and family members. Do not hesitate to direct students under duress to seek assistance; we have the resources to step up and we will do so.

Leonard broadened the topic of discussion beyond DACA by asking about the steps being taken on campus to bridge the divides that have been revealed by the election. Dan Shea outlined the programming steps taken by the Goldfarb Center, including both newly scheduled events and changes in previously scheduled events. The upcoming Cotter Debate on American Democracy, for example, has been refocused to meet the challenge of "trying to get our arms around" the current situation, and doing so in a way that is intellectually diverse. Margaret McFadden spoke of scheduled events in January, mostly in connection with MLK Day and the inauguration, but also of other possibilities that are still in the planning stages.

Jay Sibara inquired about the willingness of the school to provide legal assistance, if necessary, to students in connection with their documentation, and also whether the availability of that assistance extended to students after graduation? What provisions are we willing to make to enable undocumented students to complete their educations should they be sent away? Bevin Engman and Paula Harrington both asked about counseling services for students who might be under undue stress, perhaps because of their experience of hate speech, their DACA student status, or visa-related travel restrictions and family concerns. What sort of outreach is there?

The pressures on our counseling services are way up this year, and this is not a local phenomenon. The Ohio State University, for example, now employs 65 full-time counselors, and they still feel under-staffed. Although we have increased our resources and scheduled more contact hours in response to steadily increasing
demands, there was an unanticipated spike this semester. We have some counselors with international experience and language capacity (including Mandarin and Turkish), but we need more, and we need to take the next step of reaching out proactively. More staff are needed, but these are positions where it is particularly important to find the right person, and that takes time. Greene speculated that the demands are likely to continue increasing as we attract more high-performing students. Engman, commenting on the Summer Diversity Retreat, said that bringing together diverse groups did result in thoughtful discussions, but that these were also difficult discussions; the kind of student body we want to attract and nurture may well require higher maintenance. Michael Donihue reiterated the point that the drive for excellence can exacerbate mental health needs, so Admissions might factor in these considerations. Matt Proto acknowledged that the process is prone to creating anxiety, so a more holistic approach is called for, including attention to the support that is available to applicants once they are admitted and arrive here. Greene, responding to Sibara’s earlier inquiry and to Lindsay Mayka’s concerns about students whose families may be targeted for deportation, thanked them for raising the topic of our support for students after and beyond Mayflower Hill, adding that that the numbers involved are relatively small, so our response can be personalized. This is a quickly-evolving issue requiring close monitoring and the ability to adapt our responses to do what is necessary to further our mission.

V. New Business

McFadden introduced a motion from AAC to create a minor in English. By request, it will wait 2 months, until the February meeting, before we act on it.

VI. Announcements

O’Neill reminded the faculty of the final, but timely, event with Khalid Albaih on refugees taking place in the Museum as we spoke.

Greene then took the opportunity to offer some observations (which did not even come close to qualifying as proper “announcements” but apparently the Presidency does come with some perks) about his recent visits to Colby’s overseas programs, including Salamanca and Dijon. These are terrific programs, offering extraordinary experiences to our students. One thing that became clear is that the feeling that the world is leaving some people behind is not unique to the U.S. The recent political developments that face us here have counterparts in Italy, Austria, and other parts of the world.

Maisel moved we adjourn.

Gingerly submitted,
Dan Cohen
Faculty Secretary