Minutes of the Faculty Meeting  
October 5, 2016

I. Report from the Secretary.

Since someone actually read the minutes from the previous meeting, there was a correction to make. That correction having been made – the Mellon grant being re-described as “among the largest Colby has received” – the minutes were then accepted. Despite that error, the President went on record as commending the secretary’s efforts (a transparent effort to curry favor with the record keeper).

II. Reports from College Officers

A. The President’s Report – President Greene noted the Steering Committee’s help in planning the meeting, and then launched into a report of the recent re-organization of the Board of Trustees Committee Structure.

The governance changes in the Board of Trustees echo in part the faculty governance changes at the college. The net effect was the reduction of the number of the Board’s committees from 13 to 8, as some committees were merged into others. The new organization generates new ways to combine tasks, in order to enhance the committees’ potential as vehicles for long-term strategic planning, rather than short-term tactical thinking for management and oversight. For example, the new “Board Affairs” committee combines the existing Executive and Nominations Committees. The newly formed “People and Programs Committee” absorbs most of the purview of the Educational Policy, Admissions, Athletics, and Student Affairs Committees, making it the appropriate forum for digesting and implementing the report of the Global Colby Task Force. “College Resources” will focus on development, grants, and, of course, capital campaigns. The re-structuring is being undertaken in the spirit of an experiment; the possibilities for additional changes (or pullbacks) remain in place. As part of the re-organization, the Board accepted the proposal from the faculty for increased faculty representation on each subcommittee, usually from 1 to 2.

Charlie Conover asked whether these changes would entail changes in the By-laws of the College. Greene said that they would. The bylaws have become increasingly in need of “cleaning up” for some time, and this provides an occasion for doing so. It will be taken up at the next Board meeting. Sandy Maisel asked what the effect will be on the total number of faculty on Board committees. Greene answered that the total is 11 now and 15 before. Carleen Mandolfo raised the question of how faculty representatives on these committees report back to the faculty at large. The mechanisms now are inadequate. Typically, new Board members are offered an orientation process before joining committees, so it would be meet for new faculty representatives, too. Tanya Sheehan wanted to know how this affected current faculty members serving on Board committees. Andy McGadney said that the Steering Committee will be taking up the issue, but the intent is to retain people who are in mid-term in the new analog or successor committee.

B. The Provost’s Report – Lori Kletzer opened her report by noting, as a follow-up to the discussion of the Board’s re-organization, that the topic will be on the agenda for the next day’s Chairs and Directors meeting. She then closed her report by inviting the faculty to the dedication on Friday of the College’s new telescope. Thanks go out to the Young family (P ’18, x2) for this gift. The 700 mm lens makes it the largest research-quality telescope in New England. Thanks also go to Liz McGrath and Dale Kocevski for their work in this effort.
III. Report of the Committee on Academic Honesty

Scott Taylor characterized the Committee on Academic Honesty both as a response to the presence of academic dishonesty on campus and, more importantly, as a blueprint for promoting a culture of academic integrity. This new structure represents the joint efforts of the entire committee: Taylor, Lisa Arellano, Kjell Wolk, Rebecca Conry, Ramon Arriaga, Hannah Insuik, and Lucy Hadley.

The previous system for dealing with cases of academic dishonesty focused on sanctions and reports to the Dean of Students, with the Appeals Committee as a court with the final say. Its drawbacks included inconsistencies in application; an excessively adversarial format that put everyone involved on the defensive, including the professors who were more or less on their own; and that it did nothing to promote a positive notion of academic honesty. The new system includes an Academic Integrity Coordinator and an Academic Review Board. The ARB includes the coordinator, the reporting member of the faculty, another faculty member, a student, and a non-voting representative of the Dean of the College. It will be responsible for investigations and, when appropriate, assigning sanctions. The advantages are that it gives more support to faculty, includes a “buy-in” from the student-body, is more consistent, and encourages student transformation as part of its mission to actively promote academic integrity. Possible downsides are that it may be more time consuming and may impinge a bit on faculty autonomy.

In addition to preparing this report, the Academic Honesty Committee heard a number of cases, consulted on additional individual cases, created webpages, sought out departmental input, and conducted a survey. Although the response rate to the survey was disappointing, it did provide a glimpse into the state of affairs. The committee also clarified the distinction between negligence (minor lapses of ethical behavior, perhaps unintentional due to lack of attention) and dishonesty (significant ethical violations with the deliberate intent to deceive) and addressed two important questions: Why do we sanction violations? What can we do? Sanctions represent the voice of the College, so even apart from any deterrence-effect, they protect the reputation of the College as well as all of its students. Communication with students, particularly with aspirational goals in clear view, remains the best course of action, albeit without altogether abandoning sanctions.

Lisa Arellano pointed out that the survey results, while worrisome insofar as they reveal a significant problem, are not in fact as dire as elsewhere. How serious are matters? Taylor agreed that things could be worse, but the survey results are not conclusive. There appear to be “pockets of rampant dishonesty,” and the boundary between ethical and unethical behavior, fuzzy though it may be, cannot be ignored. The fact that the emissions engineers at VW and the utilities overseers in Flint, Michigan were all college graduates is an indictment of the lax attitude in higher education. Robert Gastaldo commended using the guidelines provided by the professional organizations of the various disciplines. Veronique Plesch asked for clarification of Taylor’s use of the phrase “limited plagiarism” in summarizing the survey results. The phrase, Taylor said, was his own and not in the survey, but we now have a better idea of what to ask in the next round. Luis Millones wondered about research into which pedagogical practices promote or inhibit academic dishonesty. Taylor noted that there is a great deal of such research, recommending James Lang’s Cheating Lessons: Learning from Academic Dishonesty (Harvard U. P., 2013). Patrice Franko thanked the committee for their hard work on a job many wouldn’t want, and then raised the possibility of an Honor Code at Colby: could the culture be changed sufficiently in, say, 5 years to try one here? Doubtful, was the reply. Kim Besio then turned to pedagogy: could there be workshops on how to discourage cheating through pedagogy? Sandy Maisel followed up with a question about the possibility of self-administered tests on the committee website to educate students about what counts as plagiarism. Taylor thought that was a fine idea, and Marilyn Pukkila and Stacey Sheriff pointed out the existing resources of links on the library pages and the Indiana University modules. Taylor interjected that these resources could be part of re-education sanctions imposed for cases of academic dishonesty, although more pertinent to plagiarism cases than to cheating on exams.
Betty Sasaki and Dan Lugo led what they hoped would be the first of many discussions on diversity, inclusion, and equity, offering three prompts to serve as points of entry:

1. What parts of the Task Force’s report resonated with people?
2. Are there specific priorities or recommendations to prioritize?
3. Are there parts of the report that need clarification?

A silence that could have followed a teacher’s open-ended request for questions was finally broken by Rachel Isaacs, who commended the Task Force, but wanted to make sure that we did not lose sight of actions and policies that can make religious minorities feel uncomfortable. Sasaki agreed, adding that the needs for care, sensitivity and education in this area also apply to staff, faculty, and senior staff at the College. Isaacs then raised the issue of the decrease in the number of women in various roles on campus. Why is this? The decrease among support staff appears to be quite dramatic. Is there an inhospitable climate? Lugo said they are still trying to unearth the whys and wherefores of this. Dean Albritton remarked on how much of the campus is inaccessible or has only limited accessibility. It may be most noticeable for injured athletes but raises red flags about the attitudes in the dominant jock culture towards disabilities. Can we have an accessibility review? (And can we get rid of DIE as an acronym?)

Sasaki pointed out that this is addressed in the first section of the report, but that a formal accessibility review of the campus is certainly in order. In response to Nathan Chan’s question about who would step up to these research challenges, Sasaki said that it will have to be a multi-pronged effort with a climate survey and an equity review. Judy Stone inquired about how the current diversity requirements play into this question. Are they effective? And do the departments serving larger populations of students have a special responsibility? Lugo affirmed that the larger departments have greater opportunities to make an impact. Sasaki deferred the question of requirements to the Distribution Requirements Task Force. The response to Jen Coane’s worries about the high number of students of color who are struggling, and her lament that we cannot in good conscience increase recruitment efforts without also increasing support for the students who come, was simply, “Amen.”

Miliones expressed admiration for the report but also reservations about its efficacy in changing the culture of the College. The entire community will have to be engaged for that to happen, but our attention, energy, and efforts are directed in many directions at once – the capital campaign, the Global Colby initiative, and various construction projects. Are we spread too thin to effect directed change? Sonja Thomas also expressed admiration for the report, but expressed strong distaste for the fact that we need it. The key, moving forward, is education and training – and sadly it is not only students who need and could stand to benefit from it. What could we expect from a faculty retreat on the relevant issues? Intense discussions, perhaps, but in the end probably just a document, and some attendant self-congratulation on the effort. Marta Ameri then rose to commend the idea of diversity apprenticeships for those who don’t know a lot about diversity. There is, after all, a pronounced and rigid class system among Colby employees that stratifies us into grounds crew, administrative staff, faculty, food service workers, etc. Who, for example, has to wear nametags at work, at receptions, and at official functions? Who gets webpages and support for them? An equity audit seems in order. Martha Arterberry, in her capacity as moderator, brought the discussion to a close, and recognized...

V. Announcements

…Martha Arterberry, who announced that proposals were now being accepted for projects for Presidential Scholars. There are funds, she reminded the faculty, for these projects, including funds for CARA students (Colby Academic Research Assistants). These are offered as enticements to attract the very best students in the applicant pool to Colby, so they form an important part of long-term recruitment, diversity, and academic strategic planning.

Stacey Sheriff announced that Colby had been awarded a $220,000 grant from the Davis Educational Foundation to support two new initiatives. First, the grant will support a program for
multi-lingual writing to include the addition of a full-time, ongoing position. Ghada Gherwash will arrive on campus on Nov 1 to take up that position and devote her efforts to this program. Second, attention will be directed at developing discipline-specific writing skills within each major. Pilot programs are already on the radar in the Art, Computer Science, and Biology Departments.

With Maisel having had to leave the meeting before its end, the faculty faced, the daunting and almost unprecedented task of adjourning without his moving that we do so. Stone stepped up to fill the void.

Imprimi potest
Dan Cohen
Faculty Secretary
October 7, 2016