Minutes of the Faculty Meeting
January 13, 2016

I. Report from the Secretary.

With Paul Greenwood offering assurances that links to the full texts of motions are now included, the previous minutes were accepted.

II. Reports from College Officers

A. The President’s Report – David Greene opened the meeting by directing our attention to the Martin Luther King, Jr. Day program of events on Monday, particularly the distinguished historian Nell Irvin Painter’s keynote lecture (3:00 p.m. in Ostrove Auditorium). A shout out went to Tashia Bradley, Mark Tappan, and Chandra Bhimull for their work in putting it together.

Greene then shared some thoughts on the first-year, first-semester abroad programs. Events conspired to prevent Greene from visiting those programs this fall, but he has had discussions with those students at welcoming dinners. They all spoke of entering their programs with a strong distaste for starting their college careers abroad and having to wait until mid-year to join their classmates on Mayflower Hill prior to the semester, but they also spoke of an even stronger appreciation and affection for their programs after the fact. They feel more prepared for life at Colby, so there are definite but under-advertised benefits to articulate better. They were all quite satisfied with the welcome and orientation they received on their arrival here. Given all that, “Fall Study Away” with its connotations of being separated from the Colby community may be an unfortunate name.

Next up was a report on fiscal year giving. The end of the year is typically the biggest quarter, and this past year was no exception. We’re doing well compared to the recent 6-year median levels when it comes to new cash, pledges, and assets on hand, but the Colby Fund has not stepped up and is merely in line with its recent performance. Nor has the percentage of alumni who give to the college. While not terrible, and certainly in line with similar colleges, there is plenty of room for improvement.

Greene then turned his attention to admissions and application data. With the Jan 1 deadline for the first round of Early Decision applicants now past, we can begin to take stock. Preliminary data show that last year’s enormous increase in the number of applicants to Colby was surpassed this year with a ginormous increase. With over 9800 applicants, Colby has leapfrogged significantly ahead of the median for the top schools in USNWR rankings (and, not that this is on anyone’s radar, far outpacing Bowdoin). This will put us in a better position to “curate” the student body to fit desired academic, demographic, geographic, and other profiles. There is still work to be done on the yield, however, because Colby is not yet the first-choice school for as many of the academically top-tier students as we would like.
B. Admissions Report – Vice President and Dean of Admissions Matt Proto took the floor to provide more details on where the applicant pool stands, breaking down the increases in applications by along various categorical lines – all of which showed significant increases: domestic/international, African-American/Asian-American/Hispanic, Mid-Atlantic/South/Midwest, etc. The academic standing as measured by SAT and ACT scores at least held steady, with a gratifying bump in the presence of students ranking in the top 10% of their classes. In response to a question from Whitney King, Proto gave the public/private HS split as 58%-42%; to Jim Terhune’s query, he affirmed the significant effects of partnering with Questbridge; and he spoke of the broad footprint of applicants from abroad, adding that Canada is now only the 6th most-represented foreign country, in answering a question from (Canadian) Mary Beth Mills. Additional questions about specific data on the number of students taking gap years, the percentage and impact on financial aid, and intended areas of study (from Tom Shattuck, Sandy Maisel, and Kerill O’Neill) could not yet be answered. What can be said is that the ED-1 applicants cannot be fairly characterized or criticized as “a pool of the privileged”: 28% came from diversity categories, with Hispanics leading the increases. Greene noted that California and Texas are now the #2 and #6 states by the number of applicants, commenting that this bodes well for the future given the demographic shifts in the country away from New England. The education standards established by the Texas State Board of Education received no comment.

C. The Provost’s Report – Lori Kletzer began her report with two previews of coming attractions: an internal salary analysis and the Harvard Graduate School ‘COACHE’ survey (Collaborative of Academic Careers in Higher Education). The former will focus on gender and rank; the latter will involve an approximately 25-minute web-based survey to gauge faculty workload, responsibilities, and satisfaction.

Kletzer then provided a sobering antidote to any euphoria engendered by the positive admissions report: the results of NESCAC Alcohol Survey. The data were substantial, with approximately 70% of Colby students responding and the results were in line with the 2012 survey, strongly confirming our worst suspicions: the problem is endemic; the negative effects on the culture, the community and the academic life of the institution are toxic; and the status quo is unacceptable. The question we have to ask ourselves is, “What is our role in this?”

The focus turned to binge drinking, defined as 5 or more drinks in one session for males and 4 or more for females. Even by the farcical standards of contemporary U.S. college life, Colby fares poorly. The rate of binge drinking in the designated time period (two weeks) is 75% for D-1 athletes, 82% for D-3 athletes, 89% for NESCAC athletes, and 92% for athletes at Colby. Even among non-athletes, the rate for Colby students is as high as 87%. NECSAC lives up to its reputation as an alcohol-infested league, and Colby ignominiously leads the way with the highest percentages in such categories as students who reported:

- getting drunk more than 20 times in a year
- viewing their school as a party school
- embracing a work hard/play hard culture
• engaging in drinking games
• having sleep interrupted by others’ drinking
and was second among NESCAC schools in:
• alcohol leading to unprotected sex
• alcohol use as a reason to consider transferring.

The grim numbers were broken down along gender, race, and class year lines, with whites, males, and sophomores performing the worst. The percentages of students who negative effects from alcohol – unwanted or unprotected sex, missing classes, falling behind in work, performing poorly on tests, getting sick or injuring themselves, etc. – were alarmingly high. The data were being presented in order to provoke conversation and action (not just despair).

Dale Kocevski asked whether the reports of negative effects were self-reports. They are, making then that much starker, which prompted Jeff Katz to ask whether these date were available to present to students. Greenwood affirmed that some are available, as is are some of the 2012 data. O’Neill asked whether the data for athletes distinguished in-season from off-season use, and whether the report could be used by team liaisons; Kletzer said that while we can break things down by sport, we do not have that specific data, and endorsed liaisons using the report.

Terhune referred to the Alcohol.edu report in order to respond to Nick Boekelheide’s and Stacey Sheriff’s questions about drinking patterns prior to Colby and when students are introduced to binge drinking. Mark Tappan’s inquired about whether other NESCAC schools are engaging the issue. Apparently not, Terhune noted, perhaps because there is a reticence among some schools to air their dirty laundry in public. Kletzer added that there is an “opportunity for a leadership” position for Colby on this. (One assumes that leadership of a different sort than our sundry current leadership positions was intended.)

III. Old-ish Business

On behalf of the Task Force on Governance, Sandy Maisel formally introduced its report and its motions. Although the report was presented in December, that was a preliminary move in order to elicit feedback for editorial changes, so nothing in the report is actionable at this meeting. Maisel noted several changes: Bob Nelson wanted to permit retiring faculty to recuse themselves from some committees; Martha Arteberry and Russell Johnson pointed out some grammatical errors; Johnson also prompted a clarification as to when committees are constituted (spring meetings for the following academic year would be organizational only); Judy Stone asked whether the call for monthly Division meetings was too stringent and whether stronger language calling for elected committee members actually to serve could be inserted; and there were also calls for ACFPP to clarify how IDS determines faculty divisional affiliations, for term-limits and departmental-rotations when it comes to Division Chairs.

The changes concerning Divisional meetings and elections would have to be brought up in the next meeting as motions-to-amend, along with any other amendments and proposals,
Stone opened up the discussion by asking whether the Task Force intended to add a motion to include the language under "Tasks and Principles" in the Faculty Handbook. Maisel replied that the task force considered it to be part of the motion they are bringing forward, because it is not a substantive change, but if any faculty member objects she or he can move to remove the language. Elizabeth Leonard followed with several “meta-” comments, beginning with an expression of regret for the low attendance at this meeting. She urged us all to read this “long and complicated” report with care, and reminded us of the provenance of the Task Force as growing out of a widespread “collective frustration” on the part of the faculty. She reinforced the point by reading the introduction to the original motion from April 2014, which was absent from the Report of the Task Force:

Many faculty at Colby feel strongly that the tradition of truly shared governance of the College has eroded over the past several years as a result of a number of different factors. They sense a disturbing shift toward a culture/practice of deliberation and decision-making that often neglects or fails to incorporate their collective knowledge, experience, insights, and needs as teachers and scholars. Many faculty consider this development particularly troubling in connection with issues that relate directly to the College's central mission: providing Colby students with a first-rate academic program. Faculty are also troubled by what seem like frequent and significant failures of communication back to the full faculty regarding the outcomes of deliberations that take place in various committees and/or at the senior staff level. The recent conflict over the library renovations is a good example, but hardly the only one, of the harmful consequences of this perceived shift.

Leonard also offered a range of comments ranging from lingering concerns about the make-up of AAC, the transparency of the proposed steering committee, and the replacement of the current committees on Race, Racism and Multicultural Affairs to an abiding pessimism about the likely effects of all this on future faculty meetings.

There is more to be said. It will be said in February.

IV. New Business

No new items came before the Faculty.

V. Committee Reports

Nor were there any additional committee reports.

VI. Announcements

And, in defiance of academic stereotypes, the Faculty apparently had nothing to further to say.

Thus, at 5:20, the meeting adjourned.

Gently submitted,
Dan Cohen
Faculty Secretary
January 14, 2016.