Minutes of the Faculty Meeting  
14 October 2015

I. Report from the Secretary.

The previous minutes were accepted without any grumbling.

II. Reports from College Officers.

A. The President’s Report – The results of the spring 2015 sexual assault and campus climate survey was sent out to the entire campus community and beyond: all students, faculty, staff, alumni, and parents. There was a high volume of responses covering a broad range of attitudes. Some objected to releasing the report so widely – “airing our dirty laundry” in public – as possibly detrimental to Colby’s image; a smattering condemned the whole thing as an exercise in “kneejerk, PC liberalism.” However, most of the responses fell in the range between gratitude for the data and for recognizing the gravity of the problem, and poignant recollections, thoughtful concerns, and constructive suggestions for change. Many acknowledged the need to effect a wholesale change in the culture of higher education, particularly in light of similar reports about other institutions in the media, while also appreciating how difficult the challenges are in bringing about such change. Regardless of our relative standing compared to other institutions, any sexual assault and violence is unacceptable, so Colby needs to confront the issue. An open forum is scheduled for October 20 because, “We need all the good ideas and good will” we can get.

Greene then turned to the upcoming meeting of the Board of Trustees. The first set of topics address the question of why Colby is not in as strong a position as we would like to be when it comes to recruiting and retaining the students we want. One concern is that, along with other liberal arts colleges, Colby’s yield rate is significantly lower than the comparable rates for research universities, and the disparity seems to be growing. It is an additional worry that our yield rate is lower than other liberal arts colleges, a concern that is exacerbated by the wide variety of reasons that are cited by admitted applicants for not choosing Colby. The problem does not end even when the best students do apply to and then matriculate at Colby: we have a retention problem. Our first-year retention rate of 94% is below the median rate for top-tier liberal arts colleges, and the 6-year graduation rate is similar. The transfer rate accounts for much of the attrition. Once again, there seem to be a multiplicity of factors in effect, so no single-bullet solution is likely to work. Mark Tappan and Raffael Scheck asked about the admitted applicants who do not choose Colby: Where do they go and why? What courses of study are we failing to offer? The data are unclear: since they chose 175 different institutions, no easy conclusions can be drawn; and apart from engineering, we do offer the desired majors, so perhaps it is partly a matter of communicating who we are and what we do. Laurie Osborne and Michael Donihue asked about students who transfer out: are
there discernible patterns in who they are or where they go? Again, it is difficult to generalize with any confidence: some return to their home states, but there are also Mainers who move to USM or UMO. What is clear is, Greene said in summation, “We cannot allow the status quo to continue.”

Greene then segued to Facility Planning, beginning with the long-standing need for a serious venue for theater, dance, and music performances. Two sites are under consideration: the Roberts parking lot, whose advantages include the creation of an “Arts Zone” in conjunction with the museum and Bixler complex, and the Mary Low parking lot, which would also serve as a “gateway building” to campus. Some of the pros and cons of each site were outlined. The situation with respect to the planning for Athletics facilities is similar but, if anything, more complicated given the potentially much greater scale of the construction and, regardless, the inevitably much greater costs. Our current athletic facilities were once cutting edge and among the finest in New England; they are now the oldest facilities in NESCAC and below standard. Three options are under active consideration:

(I) "kicking the can down the road": maintaining the current facilities for, say, another decade, hoping we can get by with them until then;

(II) rebuilding-the-ship-while-we’re-on-it-at-sea: significantly renovating and extending the current facilities along with phased-in construction of, e.g., a new pool and a new field-house;

(III) cleaning house (by building and then moving into a completely new one): undertaking the construction of new facilities, perhaps where the soccer field is now (which would actually situate the new facility closer to the center of campus).

The short-term cost benefits of Option I fall into the “penny-wise-but-pound-foolish” category (more like: $20 million-wise-$75 million-foolish); the long-term cost-benefits may point to the third option, but the up-front costs are daunting and would be prohibitive without major gifts (but there may be one in the offering).

Transformative projects, experience suggests (and hope insists), occasion transformative gifts.

In response to Kerill O’Neill’s and Bevin Engman’s questions about the timeline for deciding on the sites and then completing the new facilities, Greene deferred to the Board on the site decision but gave the year 2020 as a reasonable estimate for completion, noting that these would be the College’s two largest capital projects since moving to Mayflower Hill. Bob Gastaldo asked whether these projects were consistent with the previous discussion about “putting academics first” as part of our efforts at recruiting and retaining the best students. Greene’s emphatic reply, “Arts is Academics!” was met with equally emphatic applause from around the room (for the sentiment, not the grammar in the Secretary’s paraphrase). He added that first, we need to clear the queue – the need for a performing arts center has been at the top of the list for well over a decade; we need to get moving on this so we can get to other items – second, some parts of the proposals are contingent on whether funding is available, and, third, proposals of this magnitude are generally not in a competition for the same financial resources – it is not as if major gifts for the Arts would be available for Athletics if the Performing Arts project were not on the table, and vice-versa. When Bruce Maxwell asked whether the Performing Arts Center
would be something that would primarily serve the college, or be a resource for the larger surrounding community – or perhaps whether we’re aiming for the premiere concert hall in all of Maine – Greene said that this was something for the planners to decide. A first-rate concert hall would be a first-rate resource, but regardless, the current facilities are manifestly inadequate.

Greene noted that the question of alcohol abuse will also be a topic for discussion at the Board meeting, including, he added in response to Engman’s question, the connections among alcohol consumption, sexual violence, and student retention. The subject of Honorary Degrees will also be on the agenda.

B. Dean Of Students’ Report – Jim Terhune reported that two students were hospitalized late on a Friday afternoon two weeks earlier, apparently alcohol-related in connection with an Ultimate Frisbee team party. The leadership of that team has been cooperative, and no information implicates either forced drinking or hazing, although it is certainly interpretable as having been a coercive environment. Some sanctions have been put in place; further actions are possible.

C. The Provost’s Report – Lori Kletzer began by reminding the faculty that the report on alcohol and sexual assault was sent around as an e-mail attachment, and that the deadline for nominations for the Library Planning Group is impending.

Kletzer then turned to data on the demographics of the faculty and some projections from that data. Based on when current faculty were hired (46% before 2000/54% since), normal retirement and attrition patterns, and expected growth in the size of the faculty, we can expect perhaps as many as 123 (!) new hiring opportunities in the next decade and a half. This is an enormous and exciting opportunity to affect the shape, nature, and diversity of the faculty, although it may perhaps be less exciting for the grayer cohort among those present.

III. Old Business

There was no “old business” to attend to (apart from the unseemly anticipation of the departure of the aforementioned gray cohort).

IV. New Business

Nor was there any new business on the agenda.

V. Committee Reports

We were, however, fortunate enough to have two committees reporting in.

Committee on Mission and Priorities: Michael Donihue, after identifying the members of the Committee, asked for suggestions for agenda items. The CMP has already met three times and expects to continue meeting every other week. The September 25th discussion focused on “Brian Clark's Pyramid” (to either give credit where credit is due or else to name names) as a framework for thinking about how
we direct our investments in academic programs, facilities, etc. The October 7th meeting reviewed a summary of athletics facilities planning and addressed themes from Greene’s presentations at the September faculty meetings.

**Task Force on Shared Governance:** Sandy Maisel announced on behalf of the Task Force that a draft report of their work is now available and that a series of meetings have been scheduled with the different divisions (merely for convenience) to get feedback. Some parts of the final Report will require Faculty approval; others will not require any Faculty action.

VI. Announcements

1. Steve Saunders reminded the faculty of the CARA Program, part of our efforts to recruit the best students, which funds 3 or 4 years of research assistantships for Presidential Scholars.

2. Paul Greenwood, channeling Stacey Sheriff, called for applications for course development grants (of up to $3000) for WI courses.

3. Paul Greenwood, now channeling Walter Hatch, announced the Oak lecture at 7:00 tonight.

4. Shalini LeGall announced first, that there is a gathering at 5:30 this evening at the Museum to talk about teaching; second, that tomorrow, October 15, is the Whistler Symposium; and third, that the Bowdoin and Colby museums will be co-sponsoring a workshop on the connections among Art, Science, and eco-criticism on December 14-15.

5. Kerill O’Neill announced two upcoming deadlines, October 19 for proposals for Humanities Themes for any of the next three years, and October 30 for student research grant applications.

6. Karen Kusiak, as co-chair of the Athletics Advisory Committee, announced that the practice schedules for athletic teams have been posted, but that the times often reflect coaches’ availability rather than mandatory practice hours.

And with that, the meeting adjourned.

Diffidently submitted,

Dan Cohen
Faculty Secretary
October 14, 2015