Minutes of the Faculty Meeting
16 September 2015

The first faculty meeting of 2015-2016 began with brief opening remarks from President Greene welcoming the faculty to a new academic year and thanking Joe Reisert for volunteering to serve as Faculty Parliamentarian and Dan Cohen for "practically begging to serve" as Secretary of the Faculty. Remarkably, his pants did not burst into flames.

I. Reports from College Officers
A. Provost Lori Kletzer.

The Provost took steps to right a wrong from last meeting: we had not publicly noted and celebrated the promotions of Jeffrey Katz and Margaret McFadden to full professor. Justice delayed, perhaps, but not in this case denied.

Kletzer remarked on how the excitement of the opening of the school year infects new and returning students, and even jaded veterans of academe. “The incomparable Lydia Moland” (more on that later) was singled out for special attention for her signal contribution to the first-year assembly, Thanks were also extended to the 33 faculty members who participated in the “First Class” program, earning them a warm round of applause from their colleagues.

Following tradition, the new members of the faculty were introduced, a feat Kletzer managed with panache and nary a mispronounced name despite the angst that surely accompanies the challenge. Mission accomplished!

B. President David Greene.

President Greene echoed Kletzer’s praise for Moland’s ability to “hit all the right notes.” He emphasized the importance of beginning the year with an address of significant intellectual substance, noting how fortunate we have been with two “fantastic” addresses in succession (thus implicitly comparing Margaret McFadden with the allegedly incomparable Lydia Moland, and thereby publicly contradicting the Provost)\(^1\). The bar is very high for next year’s speaker!

The President’s report constituted the remainder of the meeting. He began by identifying priorities issues needing community attention this year, and followed that with reflections from his first year’s observations of Colby and takeaways from the faculty retreat. What emerged was an ambitious agenda for the faculty, the college, and the community.

\(^1\) The license to pedantry accorded to the author of these minutes by his position as Professor of Logic is not superseded by his responsibilities as Secretary of the Faculty to interpret utterances with charity, e.g., by taking into account hyperbole caused by the enthusiasm of the moment. Contradictions will not go unnoted.
Two issues were singled out as likely subjects for faculty discussions and input this year: sexual assault and misconduct on campus, and access for students from all backgrounds. Regardless of where we stand relative to other colleges, or even relative to where we have been, we are not where we need to be. The goal has to be a zero-tolerance policy on sexual assault and misconduct; and we need to be more aggressive in opening Colby's doors to qualified students from all backgrounds. Matthew Proto and Ruth Jackson were commended for their efforts in the latter case, especially their willingness to visit any school anywhere in Maine to attract the best students.

Also worthy of faculty attention is the question of Honorary Degrees. What does an Honorary Degree from Colby mean? Ultimately, the Board of Trustees decides who gets awarded Honorary Degrees and why they do, but that does not preclude faculty discussion.

Greene began his reflections by asking whether Colby is a place where faculty can do their very best work. There are several issues to disentangle and engage with here. For a start, what do the ways that we reward and incentivize faculty contributions and accomplishments reveal about our values as an institution and a community? Do effective advising and productive shared governance make inordinate or disproportionate demands on different members of the faculty? The first thing we need to do in order to understand the trade-offs that are involved is to get relevant data, so the Provost has been asked to put together a group to delve into this. Beyond that, we also need to examine the infrastructure and support faculty are given. The discussion might begin with the libraries, but it should also include performing arts space, athletic facilities, child-care services, and appropriate venues for faculty-faculty and faculty-student interaction. As a trial step in that direction, in October a café will open in the Art Museum lobby.

Possibilities for faculty flourishing cannot be separated from structural issues, e.g., whether we have the right employment categories. How well have these categories helped further the mission of the college? Is it time to rethink them? Nor can faculty performance be considered in isolation from academics. What can be done to elevate support, and the visibility of that support, for specific academic programs? Several proposals have already been received, and some departments and programs have mapped out specific plans, e.g., a Visiting Artist Program led by Jenny Boylan. Similarly, various themes have been nominated as vehicles for innovation, e.g., the effects of educational and economic inequalities or the roles for data, environment, and globalism. These will all be within the purview of the Committee on Mission and Priorities.

In thinking about the nature of community, the nature of our community, and whether we have a broad enough and deep enough commitment to diversity, we cannot avoid the conclusion that despite some progress, “we are very far behind where we need to be; and we are not in a leadership position.” There is heavy lifting to do here. Betty Sasaki and Dan Lugo will co-chair a task force addressing institutional issues, but it cannot be the sum total of our efforts. We need a series of community-wide discussions about how we think of ourselves, who we want to be,
and how can we get there. Jim Fleming noted that the process of Overseers reports, while a potential resource, should also be on the table for discussion.

We have a program for conflict resolution, Workplace Advisors, that provides advisors for staff; we are going to pilot a larger ombuds program to provide safe space for addressing issues that arise anywhere and among any constituents in the College. Although it will ultimately answer to the President, it will report to and serve the entire community.

The President then turned his attention to the faculty retreat and the topic of redefining the student experience at Colby. Questions ranged from the extent to which the student experience needs redefinition to how departments, programs, and libraries, the distribution requirements, and faculty research contribute. The themes that emerged focused on more strongly articulating our values; encouraging intellectual risk-taking; thinking in terms of literacies rather than distribution requirements; demands on faculty, faculty time, and the structure of rewards and incentives; and the dispersion of student energy and attention. We need to ask, for example, both how we can attract “quirky” students and how we can accommodate them. We want more than just “check-the-boxes” students: we want the kind of diverse and inclusive student body that showcases academic excellence and embodies meaningful and impactful lives reflective of a broad liberal arts education, in a vibrant residential, co-curricular experience.

The task of the Committee on Mission and Priorities is set: begin actualizing the potential of this cornucopia of energy, vision, plans, and goals. In the fall, the agenda will include both master planning and such specifics regarding the student residential experience – at Colby and in Waterville – the athletics program, the career center, child-care, and the performing arts. The spring agenda should include investments in the academic programs, the library and study facilities, diversity and inclusiveness recommendations, and Colby’s world-wide presence and activities.

Why focus on the student experience now? Because today’s decisions regarding, say, performing arts or athletics facilities have the potential to affect the admissions cycle and our efforts to attract the strongest applicant pool and enroll the strongest, most interesting students. And that leads to (Not: “Begs”!) the question of what characteristics we want in our student body. A preliminary list would include: intellectually adventurous, well-prepared for a rigorous curriculum with a broadly distributed set of academic and co-curricular interest, and open to new ideas with a global perspective. In sum, they should be committed to learning from and contributing to an intellectual community; they should have the potential to be intellectual partners with the faculty.

Well and good, but how can we get there? Redefining the student experience should be but one of many efforts to that end. The challenges that present themselves are also opportunities: curricular opportunities, pedagogical opportunities, research opportunities, architectural, opportunities, developmental, opportunities, and funding opportunities.
Discussion and questions from the faculty filled the brief time remaining. Lynne Conner noted that the presentation of the student experience as a pyramid (à la the food pyramid) generally acquiesces to a hierarchical schema that should not go unexamined or unchallenged, and in apparently *privileging* the arts experience as a core element of students’ co-curricular experiences actually reinforces the pernicious exclusion of the arts from its place in the curriculum. Several others seconded, strengthened, or responded to this idea, including Bill Sullivan (perhaps use “creative expression” instead), Catherine Besteman, Adrian Blevins (defending the use of “Arts”), Kerill O’Neill and Rachel Isaacs (both lauding “dynamic intellectual culture”), and Patrice Franko, who expressed fears about the institutional use of the pyramid. President Greene responded that, first, this is very much a work-in-progress, a springboard for articulating our values, not by any means a finished product, and second, it was intended only as a heuristic for us in thinking through things, not for use in any public brochures, documents, or websites.

There were also several comments and questions about implementation: Laura Saltz asked what we were to do with this now, Jim Fleming wanted clarification of Greene’s use of “global”, and Mary Beth Mills and Marta Ameri asked whether the institution was prepared to put its money where its mouth is in supporting the initiatives and programs that would make it all happen, including funding for field trips, need-blind admissions, faculty leaves, etc. Elizabeth Leonard thanked the President for his attention to the library.

II–IV. Old Business, New Business, Committee Reports.

Because the first faculty meeting was devoted to the President’s Report laying the groundwork for articulating our values, envisioning Colby’s future, and setting the agenda of projects for the new year, no old business was brought before the faculty, any new business must wait until the next meeting, and all committee reports are on hold.

V. Announcements

- With the High Holidays upon us, Rabbi Rachel Isaacs reminded the faculty of the college policy of accommodating religious observance
- Kerill O’Neill announced two events scheduled for Thursday, Sept. 17 as part of the Humanities theme for 2015-2016, *Human/Nature*: the opening of the Bigelow Labs’ “Tiny Giants” exhibition in Miller Library at 5:00 and a reading by Maine author Carolyn Chute at the Opera House at 7:00. He also invited proposals for themes for the next three years.

Ever respectful of old traditions, the faculty deferred to the ever-young Sandy Maisel who moved that we adjourn. We did.
Dutifully submitted,
Dan Cohen,
Faculty Secretary September 16, 2015