Minutes of the Faculty Meeting  
30 September 2015

I. Report from the Secretary.

President David Greene opened the second faculty meeting of 2015-2016 with some flattering words for the minutes from the previous meeting. The manifest wisdom of treading lightly on the sensibilities of the recording agent was apparent to all and apparently sufficient to forestall any objections. The minutes were accepted without change.

II. Reports from College Officers

A. The President’s Report – David Greene expressed gratitude for all of the positive feedback he received from his presentation at the previous meeting, and also reported that he’d had a productive discussion with the Committee on Mission and Priorities on the issues. He then turned to two additional items:

1. Greene was so impressed by the quality of the faculty presentations at the last two convocations for first-year students that he wondered whether there might be a way to share them with the entire student body. Perhaps something can be worked out to take advantage of a shift in the academic calendar for next year, with classes set to begin on Tuesday rather than Wednesday.

Laura Saltz and Mary Beth Mills were the first to express enthusiastic endorsement of the idea of an intellectual occasion involving the entire community. Neil Gross raised the possibility of a recommended common reading and Marilyn Pukkila suggested tying it in with the Humanities theme. Elizabeth Leonard and Leo Livshits asked about the reasons for the calendar shift and whether that meant advising duties on Labor Day. Provost Lori Kletzer noted that having move-in day on a Tuesday rather than the weekend presents hardships to some families, and that the complete logistics of the schedule change are still being worked out. Joe Reisert expressed skepticism about upper-class student attendance at such an event. While the grounds for such skepticism cannot but be acknowledged as reasonable, they can be regarded as a challenge rather than a deterrent.

2. Greene then turned his attention to the Main Street initiative, identifying the strategic goals and proposed actions on four coordinated fronts: (i) increasing the residential density of the downtown area; (ii) making the downtown area more of a regional arts and shopping destination; (iii) improving the infrastructure and physical environment; and (iv) enhancing the prospects for sustained business and economic growth.

These are all very ambitious projects, so Colby can be only part of the pool of planners and investors. Thus, for the first prong, development corporations would probably need to be brought on board to turn the possibilities for a boutique hotel
or downtown student housing into realities. The positive experiences that Trinity and Middlebury Colleges have had with such corporations provide encouraging precedents. Similarly, private developers would have to be included in the list of potential partners for the goal of making downtown Waterville more of a regional arts and shopping destination. However, it is important that Colby, along with such civic, cultural, and educational organizations as Waterville Creates, the Humanities Center, the Art Museum, and the Maine Film Center/MIFF, retain significant input into how the available retail space is reconfigured and utilized, lest the process be overwhelmed by the most profitable – i.e., the most aggressive – franchises and box stores to the exclusion of, say, artists’ housing or specialty stores. Thomas College has also been increasingly concerned and pro-active in trying to attract new and varied businesses to the area, so here is an area where we can work on coordinating pre-existent independent efforts. We will also need to include city, state, and even federal agencies and resources in plans to enhance the physical and business environments of the Main Street/downtown area. Everything from derelict properties, parking, and traffic patterns to the riverfront area, the sidewalks, and street-lights is fair game for consideration.

Jodi Koberinski, Marilyn Pukkila, and Marta Ameri raised questions about whether the planning had taken into account pedestrian traffic, current residents of the area, and the summer economy: it can’t all be about students from away with cars of their own during the academic year. Greene responded to these concerns by noting the importance of a frequent and reliable campus-downtown shuttle service; that plans include mixed-income housing to succeed the limited and mostly vacant residential properties that are currently available; and that the possibilities for summer programs, including conferences and cultural events, together with current levels of the seasonal economy and the opportunities for recapturing economic activity from summertime lakeside populations, are sufficient to ground significant optimism, both from Colby and from the city of Waterville (which, after all, “needs to have some skin in the game”).

B. The Provost’s Report – Lori Kletzer opened her report with reflections on Roger Brooks’ campus visit last Friday. The President and CEO of “Facing History and Ourselves” spoke about his success at enhancing faculty diversity at Connecticut College. He focused on the need for “energetic and aggressive” strategies that encompass short-term recruiting tactics and longer-term pipeline development, as well as on-going “inclusive pedagogy.” Tashia Bradley was thanked for her part in making it happen.

Kletzer then took up the subject of the Library (meaning: libraries) at Colby. The Library’s charge is to support and sustain academic life, and to serve as a resource for the entire community, but it faces considerable challenges. Those challenges can be clustered into two groupings: those that emerge from the mismatches (i.e., shortfalls) between our resources and our needs, and those arising from the rapid transformations in information technology. The Library Committee, examined the issues, gathered local and comparative data, and received input from different sectors of the community. What they found were significant areas of concern in regard to our staffing, physical space, and material resources, given the
magnitude of all the tasks at hand. Those tasks include providing support for teaching, for learning, for research, for scholarship, and for the larger scholarly community in the changing intellectual landscape.

Kletzer announced that a planning group (comparable to those for the performing arts and for athletics) would be created in order to focus and direct our energies in a systematic planning effort. The Nominating Committee was charged with initiating elections for the planning group. It will include the Provost as Chair, four classroom faculty, two library faculty, Clem Guthroe (ex officio), staff and students.

III. Discussion: Honorary Degrees and Institutional Voice.

Prompted by informal but extensive conversations with colleagues over the summer, Laura Saltz had asked to put the issues of Honorary Degrees and Institutional Voice on the agenda. While the precipitating cause may have been the revelations about Honorary Degree recipient Bill Cosby's utterly dishonorable behavior, the telic cause brought the discussions to fuller fruition so as to encompass three topics:

1. What public actions or stand should Colby take regarding Cosby's degree? Is revoking it called for? It is even possible? Would a statement from the College suffice? Are there other past honorees in similar circumstances? What process can we put in place to consider these cases?

2. Should Colby continue the practice of awarding Honorary Degrees? In addition to the risks of honoring the dishonorable, the downside includes the appearance of impropriety, a malodorous quid pro quo, especially when it is generous or, worse, potentially generous, donors to the College who are honored.

3. Honorary Degrees are a very visible (audible?) part of our “institutional voice” in expressing our values, but whose values are “our values” and whose voice is “our voice”? The institution is comprised of diverse constituencies with, at times, a cacophony of different voices. Still, the example of the College statement re-affirming our support for Bob Diamond is evidence that we do regard ourselves as having a single institutional voice, but it also shows that there are other vehicles available, like statements. What mechanisms should we institute to govern the what, when, and how of that voice?

Saltz’s introduction engendered a thoughtful, earnest, and valuable if ultimately (and inevitably) inconclusive discussion:

Walter Hatch began the discussion by providing some historical context: the practice has roots at least as far back as the 15th century when Oxford and Cambridge use this as a way to curry favor with politically and economically powerful patrons. That kind corruption persists with some schools listing explicit donation-rates for honorary degrees, including, remarkably, $85.00 in one case for a Doctor of Divinity degree (the divinity in question presumably being Mammon). What proportion of Colby’s recent Honorary Degrees have gone to benefactors?
Whatever it is, the practice should be stopped: the dilemma over our association with Bill Cosby “didn’t need to happen.”

Elizabeth Leonard, one of the “instigators” of last summer’s discussions, thought that we should indeed revoke Cosby’s degree: while respectful of the countering considerations, the bottom line is that the new revelations showed that he crossed the line. Jim Fleming noted that awarding and revoking degrees is the prerogative of the Board of Trustees, not the faculty. As members of the faculty, we can, of course, make recommendations, such recommendations have been regularly solicited in the past, and there is faculty representation on the relevant subcommittee of the Board, but both Adrian Blevins and Catherine Besteman observed that there is room for greater transparency in the process. Joe Reisert, reporting on his experience on that subcommittee, spoke of the extensive discussions regarding the not-very-extensive lists of proposed nominees that come in from the faculty, from members of the Board, and from others in the community. Many names on the list are inappropriate or unavailable, but we have nonetheless succeeded in bringing some exceptional and inspirational people who have made an impact. He cited Anthony Appiah and Robert Putnam as recent examples. To be sure, he added, there have been mistakes – just as there have been in admissions and even in faculty hiring. He did not cite any recent examples. Blevins and Saltz reported different experiences: the operative criteria were never clearly articulated and the committee’s discussions divided between “honorable” candidates and who-does-someone-know-and-we-might-be-able-to-get candidates. Fleming pointed out that the input from students regarding the commencement speaker comes with the force of a single voice; whatever force recommendations from faculty might have regarding honorees is very diffuse. Rachel Lesser asked whether there is a clear justification for the practice: What do we hope to achieve or gain by awarding degrees this way? Lydia Moland reiterated the importance of finding some way for the College to express something – disappointment? regret? angst? – about Cosby’s degree, and thanked Saltz for putting this important and complicated topic on the agenda.

Hatch raised one final point in the discussion: Honorary Degree recipients are guests of the College and, since the dinner is not an occasion for a serious give-and-take, they are not actually required to field questions or otherwise seriously engage with the community.

IV. Old Business

Bruce Maxwell, on behalf of the Academic Affairs Committee, re-introduced the proposal for 3-2 Dual Degree Program with Columbia University. Maxwell is an employee of the College, not a guest, so he was expected to field questions. He did.

Since we already have a 4-2 program in place, the questions all focused on timing. Livshits asked whether this required that students finish their Colby majors in three years. Maxwell acknowledged that some majors might have to make accommodations for students on this program and others might be unavailable. Leonard followed up with a question about transfer students to which Maxwell replied that since they would still need to satisfy all their degree requirements, they
might have to resort to the 4-2 option. Beth Schiller reminded us that there is a 4-semester minimum residency requirement for a Colby degree. We would not bar a transfer student who wanted to spend only one year at Colby and two years at Columbia from asking for a Columbia degree.

The motion passed on a voice vote with no votes in opposition but a handful of abstentions.

V. Committee Reports

In a gesture laden with symbolism, the Provost walked halfway up the aisle to meet Sandy Maisel and hand him the microphone as he descended to give his report as the faculty Chair of the Task Force on Shared Governance. However, if faculty expectations were raised by the ceremony of it all, it was only to put them back on hold: the report of the Task Force will be delayed. A draft of the report will be presented at the next meeting of the Task Force (scheduled for 1 October). It will then be discussed over a series of meetings with different constituencies for feedback, and, it is hoped, it will be ready for the December faculty meeting.

VI. Announcements

The Center for the Arts and Humanities will be hosting a “Reception and Pitch Party” immediately after the adjournment of this meeting in order to schmooze and brainstorm about possibilities for the next three years of annual themes in the Humanities Division.

Addendum

The Secretary, deeming it an appropriate use of the forum that the Minutes provide, would like to express his gratitude to Jim Sloat for his notes on these meetings. Sloat’s independent observations serve as corroborating data points and a reality-check on my own idiosyncratic perceptions and creative memory. Thus, I would like to credit him for content but exculpate him for form.

Deferentially submitted,
Dan Cohen
Faculty Secretary
September 30, 2015