

DATE: 3/7/03

TO: Faculty Colleagues

FROM: Terry Diggory

RE: Substitute Motion on GSA

The resolution proposed by Michael Arnush to protest 0% GSA has serious implications that need to be considered before we cast our votes. I offer the following considerations merely as an individual faculty member—who, like everyone else, would love to get a salary increase next year—but I draw on recent opportunities I have had to exchange views with other members of the college community, including students, support staff, administrators, and trustees. If the faculty are to exercise the leadership role we claim for ourselves, we have a responsibility to listen to these other voices as well as our own, and to consider how our voices sound to the ears of others.

Although the terms of the Arnush resolution will surely sound confrontational to the trustees, a more serious concern is that these terms will sound simply out of touch with reality. Among the trustees are people whose companies have laid off literally thousands of employees in recent months. Having felt that pain, how will they hear the complaint that the suspension of a salary increase for one year is “unacceptable” to faculty with secure, comfortable jobs? Among the families of our students are parents who have been laid off. How will we hear those students who come to tell us they are leaving Skidmore because they cannot get sufficient financial aid from a budget that was reduced at the request of faculty? Among our co-workers at the college are many who are convinced that the faculty think only of themselves. They will not be convinced otherwise by faculty demand for GSA, since they know full well that faculty will receive a bigger slice of that pie. If we recognize that hard times hurt the most for those who have the least, would it not be more responsible to speak out especially on behalf of those at the low end of the pay scale, as Mehmet Odekon proposed at the last faculty meeting?

I share the concern of many colleagues that we do not have sufficient information to make an independent analysis of the college’s present financial situation. But that does not mean that we should jump to a conclusion as if it were a leap of faith. Before we dig in our heels, we had better be sure that there is solid ground under them. Right now, we cannot be sure.

I also share the concern that past indecisiveness—in which the faculty surely share some responsibility-- has gotten us into the present mess. The trustees also share that concern. From their perspective, to reverse the decision that has been made at this point about 0% GSA would be a reversion to a state of indecisiveness, not a magnificent display of conviction on the part of the faculty.

Finally, I share the concern of all of us that Skidmore’s ability to attract the best possible candidate to be the next president is crucial in helping us recover the sense of direction

that many feel we have lost for the moment. As a member of the Presidential Search Committee, I have been asked whether faculty willingness to submit to the indignity of a 0% GSA might only encourage trustees who are imagined to be eager to bring in a presidential ax-wielder to finish the job of cutting us down. I suspect—and here I must reiterate that I speak only for myself—that the opposite is the case. It seems to me much more likely that trustees would turn to an ax-wielder only as an act of desperation, when they are convinced that the faculty are so out of touch with reality that a presidential negotiator would find no one to negotiate with.

I agree that we face serious problems. But I think the best way to solve those problems is to pull ourselves together as a college community, not only as a faculty, and to lay out clearly the agenda we expect the new president to take up as soon as he or she takes office. I therefore intend to offer the resolution below as a substitute motion if the Arnush resolution is moved. I believe the substitute motion can be more productive. Equally important, I believe the faculty deserve a choice among alternative ways of representing their position.

TEXT OF SUBSTITUTE MOTION

WHEREAS the faculty of Skidmore College deeply regret that the President, the members of President's Staff and the Board of Trustees perceive the college to be in such dire financial straits that they are considering a 0% GSA in the next annual budget,

THEREFORE, be it resolved that the faculty hereby strongly urge the President, the members of President's Staff and the Board of Trustees:

1. To weigh most carefully, before final adoption of the next annual budget, the potential demoralizing effect of a 0% GSA on all employees and especially the material impact on those employees who currently receive the least compensation.
2. To effect reforms in both administrative process and structure that will ensure:
 - a. Provision to the faculty of full, clear and timely information about the college's finances and budget;
 - b. Exercise by the faculty of its proper role in college governance.
3. To designate such reforms among the highest priorities both now, at a time of transition in college leadership, and immediately upon the assumption of office by the next President of the college.