

September 9, 2005 Faculty Meeting Statement
By Timothy Burns, Chair of FEC

The Preamble to Part Two of the Faculty Handbook states that “Skidmore College is committed to the principle of shared governance. Shared governance recognizes...the unique role that faculty play in institutions of higher learning by virtue of their special knowledge, experience, interests, and values.” The Preamble further states that “Faculty governance is...especially concerned with those subjects for which faculty members have primary responsibilities.” It lists among those subjects “academic standards” and “educational policy and curriculum.” Finally, the Handbook notes that participation in faculty governance aims at “advancing the quality of academic life across all the disciplines at Skidmore.” The Handbook echoes in this regard AAUP Guidelines for the central role of the faculty in determining educational policy matters, including educational matters within Student Affairs

In light of this, FEC believes that the recent changes in the structure of the Dean of Studies office and in Student Affairs constitutes an administrative preemption of consultation as we have traditionally understood the term in college governance. FEC will soon issue an out-report on the problems that it has found in this process. It wishes to note for now that the administration had in its possession since December a copy of the Report of the Dean of Studies Study Group, and despite its claims to have consulted with faculty, it failed to share that Report with CEPP, IPC, or CFG, until June 26th of this year. FEC does not believe that faculty representatives on a Study Group constitutes "faculty consultation," nor that the individual members of such a study group are responsible for reporting its findings to faculty committees rather than to the administrators who formed the group. It also notes that the Report itself, which has been cited as evidence of faculty consultation, recommends the following:

“After reviewing this report, the Dean of the Faculty and the Dean of Students have discussions with the Interim Dean of Studies and the Registrar to address the main recommendations made above as well as the questions associated with these additional factors, and then develop a plan of action. Once a complete plan is developed, it should be shared with President’s Staff, CAPT, and IPC and revised appropriately.”

FEC notes that no such plan of action has ever been shared with IPC nor with CEPP, nor with CFG, nor, to our knowledge, with any other faculty committee. A February meeting of the VPAA and the Dean of Student Affairs with CEPP was brief and informational and does not rise to the level of consultation, the lack of which is all the more remarkable given the fact that both the VPAA and the Dean of Student Affairs sit on CEPP. Finally, FEC notes with dismay that despite the counsel of CFG last April that faculty consultation is necessary before proceeding with this restructuring, the administration has not only proceeded to put in place major elements of the new structure, but continues to claim even today that it did not need to consult with faculty over this, even while it claims that sufficient consultations took place.

Presented with a fait accompli, and recognizing the sincerity of apologies from the administration for its mistakes in process and in its misstatements, and given assurances from the administration that it will use the new governance structure to consult with faculty and to prevent such preemption of consultation, FEC, together with the VPAA and the Dean of Student Affairs, has proposed to CEPP that it review this restructuring expeditiously this fall, and report its recommendations to the faculty. FEC's proposal to CEPP was as follows:

“[that the VPAA and Dean of Students] bring to CEPP...a proposal for review of the restructuring of the Dean of Studies office and the creation of the Office of Student Academic Services. FEC agreed that, should CEPP take this up, CEPP would need for its purposes copies of the Retention Report of December 2003, the Dean of Studies Study Group Report of December 15, 2004, the plan of action called for in that Report, a brief rationale for the plan of action, and a statement of the educational mission of the Office of Student Academic Services. CEPP would use these and any other materials it needs to evaluate the restructuring. It would hold open forums and use other appropriate instruments as it deems necessary.

FEC also believes that a committee must be struck in two years (i.e., in September 2007) to evaluate the structure and office(s) that have been put into place. FEC would be consulted on the membership of that committee, which would include appropriate faculty representation.”

FEC has received a reply from CEPP, and we understand that CEPP will now share its reply with the faculty.