

FACULTY MEETING
April 9, 2010

THE ROLE OF THE FACULTY IN RECOMMENDING STUDENTS FOR SKIDMORE DEGREES

Introduction:

At the close of every academic year, at a special faculty meeting in May, the faculty routinely assembles to recommend (by vote) that the Board of Trustees approve the list of students qualified to receive their Skidmore degrees. On a few occasions in the recent past, the faculty has debated the question of whether integrity infractions of a social (not academic) nature should preclude the awarding of honors, or, indeed, if sufficiently serious, the awarding of the degree itself. The Committee on Academic Standing (CAS) addressed itself to the question of honors for students who had committed social integrity violations and presented to the faculty at the May 2008 meeting their carefully considered conclusion that CAS “should not, and therefore will not, screen the list of students eligible for academic honors for social integrity violations in the way it does for academic integrity violations” (The “CAS Report on Academic Honors and Social Integrity Violations,” 14 May 2008). The CAS report did not, however, settle the question of whether integrity violations should be considered in the faculty vote to recommend qualified students for degrees or, indeed, the meaning and importance of the faculty vote in that process. This document attempts to clarify the role of the faculty in recommending students for their degrees, offers a series of resolutions for faculty conversation and endorsement, and points to the institutional process for determining matters that extend beyond the purview of Academic Affairs.

Be it resolved that:

- the Faculty vote regarding the degree list is related specifically to the affirmation that the students on this list have met all academic requirements for the awarding of the degree. No asterisks should appear if the student has met all academic requirements.
- the documents generated for the Faculty Meeting therefore include a footnote as follows:

The names on the list represent those students who have completed or are expected to complete by August 31 all the academic requirements for the Bachelor of Arts or Bachelor of Science degrees; names of students who are not expected to complete their academic requirements until August 31 are marked with an asterisk. Students who have not met all other requirements (including financial, academic integrity, and social integrity obligations) may have the diploma withheld.

- the students' names appear in the Commencement Bulletin in the same manner as they do in the documents for the Faculty Meeting, and that the Commencement Bulletin include a footnote as above.

Rationale:

The faculty's recommendation (by vote) to the Board of Trustees that the Board grant the Skidmore degree to qualified students is not a pro forma exercise; it is a representation to the Board that the faculty stands behind the academic quality of the Skidmore degree. Should a faculty member rise and point out an error in the list, the Office of the Registrar would then make corrections before the final publication of the Commencement Bulletin. No copy is sent to the printer until after the vote has been completed. The faculty, therefore, carries out a powerful symbolic and practical function in affirming the academic qualifications of the students proposed for Skidmore degrees.

Should the faculty also be satisfied that the students whose degrees they are recommending are in good standing with the College as regards financial and integrity matters? While it is indeed the business of the faculty to be assured that any academic integrity matters have been satisfactorily resolved, the question of financial and social integrity is more complex. The matter of finances (whether debts owing to the College have been discharged) has typically been a private transaction between the student and the Office of Financial Affairs. Social integrity issues are even more complex because faculty members are unlikely to be in possession of all the facts necessary to make an informed and responsible judgment; moreover, in some cases, a necessary investigation has not been completed by the time of the faculty vote.

Nevertheless, it is reasonable for faculty members to seek assurances that, even if they themselves are not able to make a judgment about the good social standing of graduating seniors, a process is in place to preserve the integrity of the institution and the integrity of the Skidmore degree. Naturally, we are most concerned about incidents that occur close to graduation, incidents that might require resolution in the courts as well as in the proceedings of our Skidmore Judicial System. In the *Student Handbook*, you will find the Honor Code, the Student Code of Conduct, and the process to be followed in disciplinary matters even up to dismissal from the College (Skidmore Judicial System) at the following links:

http://cms.skidmore.edu/student_handbook/honor-code.cfm

http://cms.skidmore.edu/student_handbook/judicial-system.cfm

Process for discussion of this resolution:

- VPAA Staff
- President's Cabinet
- CEPP
- CAS
- Student Affairs sub-committee of IPPC
- Review by College Counsel
- Faculty discussion hosted by CEPP and CAS